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# THE VULGARIANS

BY  
EDGAR FAWCETT

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## **THE VULGARIANS**







*"Marian's answer came slowly."*

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# THE VULGARIANS

*By Edgar Fawcett*

*Author of "The Evil that Men Do," etc.*

*Illustrated by Archie Gunn*



1903

**S THE MART STREET**  
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*For they say, if money go before, all ways do lie open.*  
SHAKESPEARE—"Merry Wives of Windsor."



# THE VULGARIANS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### BEYOND THE DREAMS OF AVARICE.

APRIL had been petulant and even savage, but May had succeeded her with skyfuls of bland blue above, and with timid yet diligent greeneries below. In this far Western town, built on a flat plain, whence the Rockies, with their scintillant summits, were distinctly visible, Nature seemed to have laid herself down as if from fatigue. She had done such dazzling things, you might have said, a hundred miles eastward, that she had taken a sort of blank breathing-spell before greeting the Pacific with that new occidental Italy which has been named California.

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As young Leander Troop came sauntering through the high street of Stratton, he bore with a certain soldierly carriage his tall and graceful form. But into the gray crystal of his eyes had crept a new dimness, and on his blooming and clean-lined face had fallen a subtle pall of worry.

"Such a mighty sum!" he kept thinking, "such a mighty sum! The lawsuit began ten years before father died. Heaven knows, we had money enough as 'twas. But now the lawsuit's settled, and we've got millions more."

Leander soon paused before the family dwelling. It was the largest private house in Stratton, and therefore, with its amplitude of yellow and cream-colored woodenness, it was also the ugliest. It had two enormous wings, each almost as big as itself.

One day—so the story runs—a person of critical knowledge and taste drifted into Stratton. As he passed the Troop residence he is said to have murmured: "Dear, dear! With two wings as big as that why doesn't it fly away?"

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The young man found his mother waiting for him. It was almost dinner-time; the Troops dined at half-past one.

"Where's the girls?" Leander asked, with crisp alertness. "We'd better see each other all together, right here, before thinking about dinner. Uncle Asa's been talking with me down at the place. I've got something pretty important to say."

The "place" was a real-estate office, over which Leander's uncle, Asa, had presided in lonely sovereignty ever since the death of his dearly loved brother, Matthew Troop.

"Important?" was the iteration. "Mercy, Lee! I hope it ain't anything horrid?"

"No, ma—oh, here are the girls. Sit down, Ernestine. Sit down, Lola. Now for it; now I'll fire away."

"I guess I know what you've got to tell us, Lee," said Lola, with head posed prettily sidewise. "You're engaged to Annie Shelton."

Leander started, and then replied, with pecu-

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liar gruffness: "Cut your nonsense, Lola. If I was, I'd let her tell it." He suddenly grew silent, as if this allusion to Annie had dealt him some sort of wound; but he soon found his voice again. "I've just been having a talk with Uncle Asa. The lawsuit's ended forever, and in our favor. Everything's clinched and riveted."

Mrs. Troop gave a motherly shrug. "We're all just like babies about these matters. I guess your poor pa thought so, too, the same as your Uncle Asa does." She laughed, a little wearily. "I s'pose it means there's more money out o' those mines and railroads and things. Lord knows, we've got enough. I don't want any more, unless to give away."

"There is more money," said Leander, and he said it with so singular an accent that his three listeners gave one another sharp, flurried looks. "There's a great deal more." After this, he spoke several sentences in the deliberative American way that so often accompanies disclosure of momentous tidings.

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Presently, Mrs. Troop began to cry. She was still a comely woman; blond, with large eyes of infantile blue. Sorrow for an adored husband had somehow dulled the azure of those eyes with a mistiness indefinably sweet, like the sanctity rather than the actual trace of her widowhood tears.

"It scares me, Lee, it scares me! I feel it ain't right to have so much. If I was smart, and could spend it building colleges and 'sylums and such like! But I ain't smart; I'm only a foolish know-nothing! And each of us four has got the same! By the terms of your poor pa's will, you said, didn't you, Lee? Oh, it's awful! I feel as if there was a big weight on me. I feel as if I was being buried alive!"

"Oh, you'll get over that, ma," said Ernestine, rising and beginning to caress her.

"Yes, ma, you'll get over it," chimed in Lola, rising also and following her sister's example.

Leander moodily nursed one knee. "By George!" he mumbled, "this beats all! Why,

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the whole three of you take it in the glummest kind of style."

Ernestine looked at her brother with fixity. "I don't," she said, "I'm glad. I'm ever so glad."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE TROOP FAMILY.

ASA TROOP had told his nephew that he would drop in after supper, and at eight o'clock he promptly appeared. The evening continued scarcely less warm than the day had been, and they all repaired to the main piazza, and sat there in the dusk. A hazy, yet breezy, Spring heaven, full of delicate gleams of light, threw down on angular and unlovable Stratton the grace of a transfiguring glamour.

"Well," Asa began, "I guess Lee's told about the new turn o' things. I'd have told you, Maria, long ago, if I hadn't thought 'twould set your nerves on edge wonderin' who'd get the best o' the fight. Those two fellers, Heath and Rodney, are downed now, as they deserved to be ten years ago. Perjury's no name for their oaths

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in court, and if 'twas worth while to tighten the screws I could prove forgery, sure's a gun."

Then he grew explanatory, but only as far as the unbusinesslike intelligence of his listeners would permit. He went over the battlefield, so to speak. Here was a big repulse for the foe; there victory had wavered; here was a pitched fray; there, finally, a just cause had triumphed. He portrayed Heath and Rodney with their bravado hanging about them in tatters, and their braggadocio turned to whimpers. Then he touched on the *spolia optima*, the conquerors' almost unparalleled prize of gold.

His brother's death had left him with a deep sorrow and a vast responsibility. Matthew and he had loved each other as brothers rarely love. Immense profit had come to them from the buying and selling of land; but it had been their tact, shrewdness, pluck and luck, all blended, that had enabled them to reap from great mountainous golcondas of both silver and gold this harvest whose enormousness now stood unquestioned.

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People hundreds and thousands of miles aloof, Asa told himself, would soon be saying: "Another of those colossal fortunes out there, all fallen to a single family." There had been a great deal of money when Matthew died, but there would soon be an amount so much greater that he often thought of it with bated breath. Here was a family actually inundated with wealth. And such a family! The position was ludicrous. Again and again he reviewed it.

First, his sister-in-law: There were horses and dogs that might have struck you as possessing more cerebral force. She appeared to be made up of instincts. She had been a poor girl, kind and sweet to the core of her simple heart, and she had never really been anything else.

Next, Leander: Well, there was one matter to be thankful for—this future young Aladdin might assume airs that would set folks tittering behind his back, and he might commit blunders of taste that would shock propriety to its centre; but he would never soil himself with silly vices.

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Next, Ernestine: No wonder they called her handsome! She had her father's flashing hazel eyes, his wavy black hair, his fresh-textured skin, which years of laborious life had never blighted. She had not done ill at school, showing brains there, no less than beauty. Her brother had lately paid serious court to Annie Shelton, a shoemaker's daughter, and it looked as though this were his final choice. But Ernestine had not "kept company" with any one. She had twenty admirers, and not a single lover. She wished to go East; she had even a hankering after Europe. She was a practical girl, but she also had her streak of romance. It was a streak, too, that went far in; it dove to bed-rock. But wasn't it too late, now, for her to become a fine lady? Wasn't it too late to repair the insufficiencies of her past bringing up? This realization might drive her back to Stratton if she ever went far afield. Uncle Asa, dreading perils and disappointments, fervently hoped that it would.

Next, Lola: Of course, she had been a baby

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at two—she was still a baby at twenty-one. There were certainly six young men in Stratton waiting to marry her, and she had never been able to decide which one she would take. The nonsensical part of it was that she loved them all—in Lola's way. She loved everybody, man, woman and child, who was nice to her. And since everybody was more or less nice, it followed that she went about scattering her smiles on the entire population of Stratton, from boot-black to bank-director. “Dear little thing,” pursued her everywhere, as a bee's buzz will pursue a nosegay. In her plumpness and rosiness, with her mother's innocent blue eyes, sunny-haired and dimpled as Hebe, saying silly things with the dainty, unconscious courage of a brook that babbles among its cresses, she was just a human kitten, a feathery nonentity. When you tried to conceive of her as a great heiress, you seemed to be putting the wings of an eagle on the ribs of a wren.

Uncle Asa's position partook of drama, and drama extravagantly new. He had gained for

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these four recipients a tremendous dower, but one fraught, for each of them, with a novelty pungent, unique. Much of their past had been his to manipulate and superintend; their future must be their own. What would they do with it? What pathetic things might they not do with it? Was not this bulk of affluence both ludicrously and mournfully misplaced?

"Yes, we've got it all safe and sound at last," Asa now continued. "I'd figured the whole sum out pretty careful before I told Lee. He said, Maria, that you took it kind o' melancholy, first off.", Here the speaker laughed a throaty laugh that somehow suited his native whine and drawl; it sounded like the crushing of thick-shelled nuts. "But I'm glad to see you got over the blow," he concluded, with drowsy satire.

"It's lucky we've got you to take care of it for us, Asa," said Mrs. Troop, quaveringly.

This gave her brother-in-law the cue he wanted. "Oh, bet your life, all of ye, I'll take care of it! But there's one thing I'd better say straight out;

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I mean to stick right here, round these parts, as long as I live. No globe-trottin' for me. Now you, Maria, may want to go roamin' East with Lee and the girls?"

"No, no," asseverated Mrs. Troop. "I ain't goin' to leave Stratton. I've lived here with *him*, and I hate bustlin' about. Let Lee take the girls without me."

"Oh, p'r'aps you'll change your mind, ma, at the last minute," said Lola.

"That's so," added Ernestine.

"No, no," repeated their mother; "it's goin' to be awful, but I'll stay here."

"How long, Ernie," asked her uncle, "did you propose to stay?"

"About a year and a half," was Ernestine's prompt reply.

"Oh!" shivered Mrs. Troop.

"Yes," pursued the girl, imperviously, "about a year and a half. We couldn't do very well with less."

"Not for the first time!" broke in Lola.

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"For the first time!" thinly bleated Mrs. Troop. "You mean, then, to keep at it!"

Ernestine stiffened haughtily in her chair. "Oh, very well. Ma's settled it, hasn't she, Lee? Hasn't she Lola? We won't go at all. We ought to 'a' gone two or three years ago, but now we'll just poke along in this out-of-the-world place all the rest of our lives. Lee can take trips from time to time, and come back and tell us about the fine things he's seen. I'd suffer just as much as ma would, but I ain't going, all the same. Neither is Lola, I guess. Are you?" finished Ernestine, rather wailfully, addressing her sister.

"Not if you ain't," returned Lola, with her gay voice grown sepulchral.

## CHAPTER III.

ANNIE SHELTON.

MEANWHILE Uncle Asa smiled to himself there in the starry gloom. Both the girls were devotedly fond of their mother, and each quailed before the prospect of separation from her. Ernestine's threat that she would stay at home was really meant, as he divined, for a lure of persuasion.

But Mrs. Troop remained obdurate. Her children might go East, but she would not. The retirement of her wonted surroundings refused to be broken. Habit, timidity, and uncontrollable bashfulness and diffidence, wove barriers thick as fortresses of thorns. The whole town pitied her. She was immensely popular in Stratton, but then so were all her kin. She disliked to think she was envied, and instinctively taught her children the same aversion.

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These children, Leander included, their Uncle Asa had often covertly watched. He had heard his nephew charged with being "stuck up." More than once Asa caught himself hoping that the charge was true. When these children should go forth among the money-worshipers, among people who would not respect innocence and unworldliness as did the Strattonites, then sudden bitter and corrupting lessons might be taught them, lessons that would fill them with acute pain and dire disgust before being faced and learned.

An actual multitude accompanied the trio to their train on the day of departure. All the girls' beaux were there, and all of Leander's feminine favorites—except one.

Annie Shelton did not go. She stayed in her little room over her father's shoeshop, which was not far from the railway station, and sat there listening to the cheers that followed the travelers as they were borne away. Her eyes were hard and glassy. It seemed as if she could not weep. For a short while her needle lay idle; then, with

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hands that were leaden, she lifted it, and began to sew the coarse garment rumpled in her lap. This work meant bread for the little household, hardly less than did her father's persistent cordwaining. Her mother was always ill, and her brothers and sisters were yet too young to work.

Every offer of charity her father refused. He was held in Stratton an embittered, cynical person, with odd and repellent views of life. Nevertheless, the idea of a marriage between his daughter and Leander pleased him, despite all his alleged hatred of capitalism.

Shorn of his wealth, Annie's lover would in all respects have been easily her inferior. She was that exceptional product, found in no other country on earth save the United States, a working-girl with a finely trained intellect. She had gone through the same school that Ernestine and Lola had attended, but unlike them she had there won marked honors. Afterward, she might have earned her living in one of the hundred ways open to young women of capacity and culture

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fairly distinctive. But the malady of her mother had commenced just after she quitted school, and hence she had given up every tempting chance.

“Never mind,” her friends had latterly begun to say among themselves; “Lee Troop is going to marry her soon, and his mother and sisters won’t put a straw in the way, for they’re all three fond of her. And why not? She’s as good as all their gold, and pretty enough to be the wife of a president.”

Pretty she certainly was, with her profuse amber hair and milky skin. Till the very last meeting with Leander, she had believed he would never depart from Stratton for so long an absence without giving her that one little chainwork of words that would seem to her like a bracelet he had locked on her wrist, he himself carrying away the key.

She would have died rather than tell him of the torture he was dealing her. It had all happened only the evening before. He had often

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kissed her, but she would not let him kiss her good-bye. Then, as love made her so quickly perceive, he grew piqued. Did he want some excuse for turning cold—for going away with a certain vital request unuttered?

They had talked on. She smiled while her heart sank lower and lower. She was not of the kind that break down and sobbingly protest. She merely looked a little paler, and felt as if invisible powers were stitching the shroud of a priceless hope.

Soon he had left her, with a long pressure of the hand and a smiling entreaty for one farewell kiss. But she laughed bravely back, and he went away; and then it seemed as if she heard the vague sound of a coffin lowered into its grave. She had heard the sound ever since.

## CHAPTER IV.

“THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD.”

By mutual agreement Leander and his sisters made few and short stoppages till they at last reached New York. They had all seen Chicago. The girls had gone there when children with their father, and to a number of the larger Western cities besides. A hunger for the still greater metropolis now possessed them.

But meanwhile the transcontinental journey had been associated with some rather exciting hints of their new importance. They rested only two days in Chicago, at the Palmer House, where they occupied sumptuous apartments—not because they had ordered them, but because the clerks at the desk took it for granted that such

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accommodations would be desired—and while there, they were visited by a horde of interviewers.

This frightened them all, and if Lola was the most embarrassed and astounded—sandwiching the inanest responses between giggles—Leander proved by no means a collected “subject.” Ernestine alone carried herself with anything that resembled an air. But all three struck the one note of innocent candor.

They spoke of their past days in Stratton with a freedom from concealment that afterward made curious reading. It sent shudders through some of the rich parvenus who perused it in print, and it roused mighty mirth in hundreds of homes. With others, again, it set vibrating the chords of sympathy and compassion. “What will happen,” these wondered aloud, “if the young plutocrats are not taught more civilized behavior?”

But still another element, the lucre-lovers, those to whom the getting and holding of money made the kernel and flavor of human life, intruded on our little group their truckling salaams. Then,

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also, the beggars, genteel or shabby-genteel, cautious or audacious, plaintive or self-reliant, were palpably stirred.

A few hours at the Palmer House had whitened the Troops' drawing-room tables with visiting-cards. At first, everybody was admitted, everybody heartily welcomed. But toward evening weariness blent itself with suspicion. Their notoriety not only lost its pleasant flavor—it tasted harshly of persecution as well.

The next day, on leaving their hotel for a walk, they found themselves almost mobbed by impertinent starers. Lola began to tremble and threaten tears. Leander hailed a carriage, in desperation.

“Will it be like this in New York?” quavered Lola.

“I guess not,” said Leander. His annoyance had vanished; he leaned back in his seat with a self-complacency that ill became him.

“I hope not!” sighed Ernestine, with emphasis.

“Let's go to a small hotel when we get there,”

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urged Lola. "And let's ask them if they won't keep our names out of the book."

"Oh, that wouldn't do," objected Leander, with a judicial frown. "We ain't going to sneak in. We didn't steal our money, if we have got such a heap."

"I never thought people cared so about money," said Ernestine, solemnly.

"Neither did I," Lola chimed in. "Ain't it awful?" And she laid a burning cheek on her sister's shoulder.

"Some of the folks that pushed their way into our parlors!" Ernestine shivered. "Why, they made me feel real sick, sometimes! I guess lots were poorer than poverty. I got so that I couldn't understand what half of 'em were driving at, with their talk about this kind of charity and that. And some of the women's faces were so woebegone! I must have given out a lot of greenbacks, and so did you, Lola, before——"

"Before I pulled you up and brought you to your senses," Leander broke in. He was sitting

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upright now; he had begun to move his head rather pompously from side to side. "Look here, girls, you're both of you as green as grass. You've got to keep your eyes open and your mouths shut—understand? We're all of us in a very funny kind of a box. But nobody's going to get the best of me—you can bet your life there. All the humbugs we speak a word to will think us fine game for their tricks. I ain't delivering any lecture. But you've learned your lesson, and don't go back on it."

Ernestine was staring out of the carriage window, with a certain sweet wildness in her dark eyes. "It's so queer for Lola and me to snub folks, Lee. We've never done it before. We've always trusted everybody unless we knew they were bad, and we've mostly either liked them or pitied them—often both."

"Oh, yes, of course," replied Leander, with a superiority of manner that struck his hearers as somewhat impromptu, to say the least. "But now there's a big change. You ain't in Stratton

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any more; you're out in the wide, wide world." Leander repeated this last clause. It had for him a rather poetic sound. He felt a new responsibility enrobing him; he must talk, hereafter, more like the prominent somebody he had become. He imagined himself drinking in a new dignity of demeanor with every fresh breath.

"It's an awful wide world, I begin to think," said Lola.

"It takes me off my feet and makes my head spin," supplemented Ernestine. "It's like going up high in a swing till your feet touch the tree-leaves, and then having that funny feeling in the pit of your stomach."

Leander waved a remonstrating hand. "I guess I wouldn't express myself like that, Ernie."

Both sisters burst out laughing. "Why?" they chorused.

"Well, 'pit of the stomach' ain't somehow, the—er—politest kind of talk."

"Go 'long!" smiled Ernestine; and Lola added, "My!"

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"New York won't be like this," Leander continued, quite as if he knew all about it, from the Battery to Bronx River. "Oh, no; you'll see."

They did see. The Waldorf-Astoria was their inn of refuge. But no refuge was really required. They were shown, after eleven o'clock one evening, to apartments that dazzled them with beauty and splendor. They breakfasted privately next morning in a room of such ornate embellishments that it almost took away their appetites. This was not because of any given order; but for the simple reason that Leander, after signing his own and his sisters' names, had said, with pregnant brevity: "Best in the house, please." And the best in the house they had lavishly secured.

He went out, soon after breakfast, and while passing forth from the magnificence of this gigantic hotel into Fifth avenue, felt surprise that his presence should attract no attention whatever. It was a surprise not wholly agreeable. The adulation of Chicago had roused his vanity more

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than he had known till now. New York struck him as a hideously ugly place, but one abounding and reveling in wealth. Still, was there anybody in it much richer than he? Oh, a few, perhaps, and these only by one or two trifling millions.

Suddenly, he looked down at his boots, and saw that they were not blacked. He had forgotten to put them outside his door when he went to bed the previous night. He had only two or three pairs, and the others were stuffed away somewhere in his unpacked trunks. A boot-blacker just then called to him, "Shine, boss?" as he passed a corner. At once, he answered the summons and gave himself, so to speak, in charge. It did not occur to him that he was doing what no member of the Four Hundred would do. He had heard of the Four Hundred, just as he had heard of Fifth avenue, and he had very recently made up his mind that the best thing for him was to become a member of that organization with as little delay as possible. Of course, it was waiting to receive him, and the girls, with open

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arms. There were some Wall-Street people whom he must see at once; he had letters to them from his Uncle Asa. He would find his way to them soon, and they would give him points, no doubt, on these social questions, just as they would instruct him respecting others of a pecuniary kind.

When his boots were made almost as brilliant as the springtide sun, he bethought himself of paying the olive-skinned Italian who had served him. He did so by producing a very fat wad of bills and choosing from these, not without a little tell-tale crook of the elbow, a one-dollar note. The youth leaped to his feet and caught his reward in both hands, while showering on its donor pell-mell benedictions, half-English and half-Neapolitan. Leander grinningly nodded, and strutted away. He had never strutted like that in Stratton—nor anywhere else.

Already the sense of his wealth had begun to make him drunk. It had gone to his head ever since the Chicago episode; and, unlike that of

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a vinous potation, its influence grew rather than waned. He caught himself staring into the eyes of passers-by, as if demanding of them some recognition. When he returned to the hotel and rejoined his sisters, he carried a parcel of newspapers. To open them and skim through their columns caused the sharpest reaction.

Chicago had telegraphed to New York. "The March of the Troops," "The Mobbing of the Millionaires," and other scornful, petulant, personal headlines were flaunted from sheet after sheet. And the sarcasm, the ridicule, the merciless fun-poking that ensued! Ernestine and Lola read with little raw cries and quick catchings of the breath.

"Are we such gawks and geese?" moaned the elder girl.

"To publish about me that I squint!" panted the younger.

"And that I lit a cigar before a crowded roomful," growled Leander, "with a twenty-dollar bill!"

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"Let's go home," ululated Lola.

"Home! Bosh!" cried Leander, starting up, red with wrath. "We've got to a land of civilization. We——"

A knock at the door cut him short. He presently found himself scanning a card. "*The Evening Ensign*, eh? Tell him I won't see him."

"It's a lady, sir," said the hotel servant who had brought the card.

"Tell every newspaper man, woman or child that comes," fumed Leander, "just this." Then he explained his "just this" in terms of condensed yet poignant profanity, and the man disappeared with a suppressed giggle.

"Do the same, girls," he said, reapproaching his sisters, "while I'm gone."

"Oh, we don't swear, Lee," chided Ernestine, "though we may be as backwoods-like as these horrible papers call us."

"Where are you going?" inquired Lola.

"I'm—er—going down-town," said Leander, buttoning the ready-made Spring overcoat he had

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bought in Stratton. "That's what they call it here—down-town. By the way, I ought to have a pair of kid gloves."

"Yes," agreed Lola. "You don't look stylish enough. Does he, Erne?"

"Oh, I dunno," said Ernestine. "I guess he looks all right. But I would get a pair of kid gloves, Lee, if I was you."

"And a high hat," suggested Lola. "But what'll we do while you're gone?"

"Order a carriage and take a ride," suggested her brother. "It's an elegant day. I'll speak to 'em down-stairs. I'll tell 'em to get up the finest outfit the house can afford. Go to Central Park."

Lola, forgetting her past distress, became all smiles. "Central Park! Oh, yes! We've heard so much about it! Kitty Strong nearly went wild over it, last Summer."

"I wanted to see the Brooklyn Bridge first," said Ernestine, with the superior manner of one who profits by thoughtful reading at the thresh-

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old of a famed foreign city. "But perhaps," she added, "we can take the bridge in as we go to Central Park."

"Perhaps so," said Leander. "I'll ask 'em down-stairs."

He did—to the keen but veiled amusement of a polite clerk. He was told that the best way to reach Wall street was by one of the elevated trains. But this mode of conveyance did not please Leander when he had learned the price it would cost. He insisted on a carriage, and sailed out of the hotel to find himself confronted by a hansom cab. At once he recoiled. The hansom wouldn't do at all. What kind of a wagon did they call that? Two wheels, and the reins running sky-high over the roof!

There chanced to be no coupé or larger vehicle just then at hand, so the porter, a sapient person of much facial control, assured him that the hansom was the great popular London cab. At the mention of London, Leander cocked his head sideways. He intended to go to London before he

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set eyes again on Stratton. The very mention of that mighty metropolis thrilled him. He got into the hansom, and gave the porter, who had visions of a possible quarter, a two-dollar note.

The crowds and clamors of Broadway soon exhilarated him. Nevertheless, he felt crestfallen. Those newspapers! Couldn't a fellow be enormously rich without having flocks of human geese so evilly hiss at him? Now and then he felt a Nero-like cruelty stir his young veins. He wanted to buy up Chicago, and then burn it for the second time. He began to realize one moment that his ignorance plus his money made him a caricature, and to tremble, the next, with desire that his detractors might be punished.

In Wall street and the region thereabout, he called on a banker or two and on several brokers. His uncle had given him some introductory letters, and these he presented with flourishes galore. His associates in Stratton would scarcely have recognized him. He addressed men more than twice his age with a pert self-security that verged

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on superciliousness. He had a voice naturally loud, and what has been called “the Western burr” clung to it at all times with stubborn tenacity.

On the arm of this or that prominent financier, he would familiarly lay his hand. “Look here, now,” he would propose, “I guess I’ll get ye just to do this for me.”

The arm was never withdrawn. The courteous countenances never grew forbidding. This strippling might be offensive, but his propositions, like his very presence, exhaled aromas of transcendent riches.

“Have a cigar?” he said to Rupert K. Renshawe, one of the most powerful grandes of New York finance. He said it after clouding the small oak-paneled office with a voluminous smoke-puff, and then took from his waistcoat pocket a little olive-and-black crow-bar of tobacco, belted with silver and gold.

“Thanks very much, Mr. Troop; but I do not smoke.”

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"Oh, well, give it to some of your friends."

And Leander tossed the cigar on a near table.

"I guess they'll like the flavor of it. I bought 'em at a tobacco-store as I was riding down-town. Paid seventy-five cents apiece for 'em. Pretty steep, wasn't it? But they're darned good."

"I'd like to throw it back in your saucy face," thought Rupert K. Renshawe. But aloud he spoke very blandly.

"By the way, Mr. Troop, your two sisters are with you, as I learn, at the Waldorf-Astoria. I have asked my wife to do herself the pleasure of paying them a visit. No doubt they will recognize her name——"

"Oh, Lord! your name's known from here to 'Frisco. They kind of expected you or Mrs. Renshawe would call. Let's see. It must be about twelve years since my father and you met here in New York. Some big railroad scheme, wasn't it? I rec'lect father talking afterwards of how elegant Rupert K. Renshawe entertained him. We three were all kids then, but I rec'lect his say-

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ing what a fine mansion you had on Seventh avenue——”

“ Fifth.”

“ Fifth, was it? Oh, yes. And what fine victuals and drinkables you served at some big banquet you gave. Now, folks say that I favor my father. I’m shorter, o’ course, but what do you think, sir, on that point?”

Mr. Renshawe pretended to think, while Leander tipped his chair back and gave his seventy-five cent cigar an upward slant. “ Your father, you young ass,” came the reflection, “ was worth ten of you. He was vulgar, and he teemed with the gambling instincts of the ex-miner; but he possessed brains, a smattering of courtliness, and a vivid if rough dignity.”

Aloud, however, Mr. Renshawe said:

“ Oh, yes; I see a marked resemblance. Who could not? Er—did I understand, Mr. Troop, that you wished to deposit with us two millions?”

Leander crossed one leg over the other. It always flattered him to be told that he looked like

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his father—doubtless because he looked so extremely unlike him.

“Two millions, yes,” he said, with another great cigar-puff. “I’ll telegraph at once to Uncle Asa.” For a moment he paused, and then threw back the lapels of his ill-made coat, bringing into relief a black shoe-lace necktie. “Well, on the whole, Renshawe, old man, I guess you better make it three.”

## CHAPTER V.

### VISITORS.

Just as Ernestine and Lola were thinking of their afternoon drive to the Park, two cards were presented them. At first they both felt like flinging the slips of pasteboard unread into the grate; but a glance at the names caused this impulse to vanish.

"Mrs. Rupert K. Renshawe," said Ernestine. "Oh, Lola, don't you remember that Uncle Asa spoke of how pa met her husband here, and gave Lee a letter to him?"

"Yes," answered Lola; "Uncle Asa said he was a great banker. But the other card?"

"It's Mrs. Arthur Warrender's. I guess she must be a friend. Of course we must see them,

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Lola. I wonder if we're dressed right. I'm afraid we ain't. And our haid—they seem to do it different here."

Mrs. Renshawe came into the room, soon afterward, accompanied by her sister-in-law, Mrs. Warrender, a young widow, about four-and-twenty. Both ladies "took in" the Misses Troop after a very few minutes. But with Ernestine and Lola it was quite different. They put out their hands; they offered chairs; they beamed welcomes. But if their two guests had announced to them, "We have just arrived by an air-ship from the planet Mars," they could scarcely have been more astounded.

It soon seemed to them that the elderly, rather stout and handsome Mrs. Renshawe was quite as much astounded as they. At every fresh word they spoke, her expression of controlled surprise, while vainly seeking to hide in civility, betrayed itself all the more. With Mrs. Warrender it was different. She was just as modish a figure, just as disconcerting in her quiet suggestions of

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another more refined and suaver feminine world, but the pure-carved face, broadening at the brows, and the limpid violet eyes, black-lashed, with a slight semicircle of sad darkness below each, wrought spells of unexplainable sympathy. She had not the hard, mature brilliance of her companion. She spoke less often than Mrs. Renshawe, but her sentences fell on the sisters' ears with an easier, less-confusing cadence.

Lola and Ernestine could not be other than themselves. They had never learned even the alphabet of social hypocrisy. When embarrassment had released them from its first benumbing thralls, they talked with a direct and untrammeled candor that was characteristic.

"I guess you ladies wouldn't care very much about Stratton," said Ernestine. "It's a very plain little city. We've never seen any folks in it like you are."

"No, indeed!" prattled Lola. "We get the fashions, though, in some of the magazines and weekly papers. But there ain't any dressmakers

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who can copy 'em properly. Ain't that so, Ernestine?"

"But dress is a minor matter, after all," said Mrs. Renshawe, who considered an ill-dressed woman more tedious, if less immoral than a murderer. "You'll have plenty of dressmakers ready at your command here, however, if you are willing to patronize them."

"Oh," cried Lola, "I love to hear that! We've got such quantities of money, now pa's old lawsuit is settled, that we needn't mind the expense one bit. We were pretty rich before, but now it's perfectly frightful!"

"Stop, Lola," said Ernestine. "The ladies will think you're bragging."

"Oh, I ain't bragging a single mite," denied Lola. "I hate having so much—that's all I meant." She paused, reddening, with a helpless look at her sister.

Ernestine told of the Chicago experience. Mrs. Renshawe smiled mechanically, but Mrs. Warrender looked a good deal of condolence and pity.

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It had been said of her that she possessed the art of making any one like her, if so inclined. But these girls would not have admitted to you that it was an art at all. It seemed to them the most essential and inherent of graces.

“ You shouldn’t have trusted the hotel people,” said Mrs. Renshawe, instructively. “ You should have made your own servants post themselves at the doors of your rooms and stand guard there.”

Ernestine exchanged a look with Lola. Then she said, quite simply : “ We haven’t got any servants, ma’am.”

“ No servants!” Mrs. Renshawe exclaimed. “ You’re not really traveling, like this, without your maids!”

“ We never had maids, as you call them, in Stratton,” said Ernestine. “ They’d have laughed at us if we’d lived as fine as that. All we ever had was the family help.” Here the girl’s eyes glittered a little moistly, and her lips trembled, and two spots of rose deepened in her

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cheeks. She had no idea how pretty she looked as she went on speaking. "Oh, both you ladies are so different from us! When I look at you and hear your soft voices, and think of how you must have lived among beautiful things and worn handsome clothes and associated with other folks as grand as yourselves, I just feel like going straight back to Stratton." At this, she abruptly turned toward her sister. "Oh, ain't I right, Lola? Don't you feel the same way?" She ended the words with a high, nervous laugh that made Lola spring toward her and catch both her hands.

"Why, Ernestine! Excuse her, ladies. She don't mean it. She's only got worked up, same as I am. You came in so sudden—you took us all of a heap. We didn't expect you, and you made us feel so funny! You see, we've always been plain girls. I guess neither of us ever felt so bashful before. But Ernestine wouldn't go back to Stratton for many a month. Would you? Come, now, own up. Why, we expect to go to

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Niagara and Saratoga and Newport, don't we, Erne? And this very morning we were thinkin' about goin' back to see ma in the fall and then comin' on again for a whole year of Europe."

## CHAPTER VI.

### MARIAN'S RESOLVE.

WHEN the ladies had reentered their carriage at the door of the hotel, Mrs. Renshawe looked full into the eyes of her husband's sister.

"Well, Marian?"

Mrs. Warrender threw back her head, laughing, and for a moment all the delicate melancholy left her face.

"I suppose, Kate, you're enormously shocked."

"I don't suppose I'm any more shocked than you are. They're simply dreadful—there's no other word."

"Yes, there is. You've forgotten. They're both pretty."

"But their voices! One could measurably forgive their uncouth English—their 'guesses' and

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'ain'ts.' But that twang, which seems to emanate, sometimes, from the very bowels of a bagpipe!"

"All that repels you could be eliminated." As Mrs. Warrender spoke her blue eyes were fixed on nothing in particular, save perhaps the broad sable blank of the coachman's back.

"No, no, Marian. The leopard——"

"Often does change its spots—that is, when the leopard's a young girl."

Mrs. Renshawe made use of a shining little vinaigrette. "They're both too old. Of course, clothes work wonders. But nowadays your shop-girl has the latest Parisian styles. Besides, the whole Rue de la Paix would only accentuate their crudities." Her tones took an irritated plaint. "I confess that I'm terribly disappointed."

The New York season was quite over. Society was either going to those exquisite abodes reared so recently near country clubs on Long Island, or to Europe, or to stately homes along

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the Hudson. Newport would not exist socially until Midsummer and early Autumn. Already a few hot days had served to lessen the cliques of fashionables lingering in town. But even now, in the maturity of May, there were small dinners, though dancing had wholly ceased. To one of these minor repasts, Mrs. Warrender drifted; to another, Mrs. Renshawe, though the latter went without her husband, the influential "Rupert K." who had to dine elsewhere. Somebody was giving a great feast to a famed foreign politician.

By eleven o'clock, Mrs. Warrender appeared in the large, dimly lighted drawing-room. She turned up one or two side-lights, throwing floods of soft revealment on the silks of tapestries, the colorful mossiness of carpets and mats, the precious pictures quite hiding the walls.

"How I hate these rooms!" she mused. "How I detest living in this house! How I long to do something that might shatter my dependence on Rupert and Kate!"

Very soon Mrs. Renshawe joined her, and

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she laid down the book that she had taken up a few minutes before. The two women sat together and talked over the people whom they had just been meeting. A footman brought Apollinaris, and placed it between them on a slim-legged ormolu table, and they sipped it from monogrammed crystal glasses while they talked.

"Those Troops," Mrs. Renshawe said, "were babbled about from soup till dessert."

"I found it the same way," Mrs. Warrender smiled. "I hope you were not too severe, Kate."

"Severe? No. I said I'd called on them this afternoon, and everybody pounced on me with questions. But I was very discreet. After all, poor rich things, I sha'n't cast the first stone."

There was no compassion in her voice, and Marian Warrender, who knew her least change of mood so well, perceived this. Had she been thinking of her boy, Gregory, his father's threats, their constant disagreements? Had she been thinking that Gregory might be tempted by the

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huge fortune of one of those girls, despite all the blunt rusticity of its possessor?

"My course was even more discreet," said the younger lady. "I made no mention of our visit. But the Troops are plainly an object of prodigious interest, just now, in smart circles."

"It will soon die out, Marian. The masses may retain it, but the classes will not. How can they? Neither here nor in England would any sort of real society tolerate those two young female boors. Of course, a good deal might be done for them in time. But it would need a year even to tear down the old structures and put up the new scaffoldings."

"Hardly, I should say, Kate."

"Oh, but it would. American women are very receptive, marvelously teachable, I grant. But Rome can neither be built nor demolished in a day." Mrs. Renshawe was slowly folding her long, pale gloves on the lap of her thin, gold-threaded gown. Fire shot from the diamonds on her fingers, and their white light seemed to

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detain her downward gaze. "I can imagine some refined man marrying one of them," she pursued, almost as if in transient soliloquy, "and taking her abroad for a long time—keeping her there under various tuitions, with excellent final results."

"She is thinking of Gregory," decided her listener, "of Gregory—that young nephew of mine—with his talents, his brilliancies, his ambitions, and, to me, his moral delinquencies!"

"But it should be done on the Continent, not in England," Mrs. Renshawe proceeded. "His wife would suffer there from far fewer mortifications. What difference do the French, Italians and Germans ever see between one American woman and another, except beauty and dress?"

Marian sighed, rather strenuously. "I should hate to see either of those girls caught by a foreign title!"

Mrs. Renshawe lifted her brows. She rarely sneered, except in the presence of her sister-in-law. It made one unpopular; and, too, one could

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always say bitter things amiably. But she sneered now, with a sense of safety.

"Dear, dear! Have you fallen in love with those two gawks?"

"Oh, no," said Marian. "But I don't feel toward them as you do, Kate. They are genuine; they are pieces of human nature, utterly without adornment, yet utterly without deceit."

"I wonder if all the beaux in their deserted Stratton would endorse your verdict. They may have left behind them an uncouth crowd of heart-broken Sams and Tims—especially the blond one, who uses her eyes and giggles." Mrs. Renshawe seemed to say this no less lightly than cruelly. But at once a cloud passed over her face, vanishing quickly from its disciplined surface. "You spoke of a foreign title," she continued, serious hardness pervading her voice. "I didn't tell you that Lord Usk took me in to dinner this evening."

"No. I imagined you knew, Kate, that nothing about Lord Usk would concern me much."

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“He bored me dreadfully, my dear. He did nothing but talk of you, and it all meant the same thing. He is madly in love with you, and I can’t help him. Nobody can help him but yourself, and you will not stir a jot.”

“I wish,” said Marian, low-voiced, with a weary fall of the eyelids, “that you would always, in such cases, turn the tide of conversation.”

“Good heavens! I’m not Joshua. I can’t make the sun stand still! I say, Marian, look at me, please. No, not that way—full in the eyes.”

“Well, Kate?”

“Do you realize that you are doing a very reckless thing? It needn’t be detailed, for you must understand. Rupert, your brother, is greatly out of patience with you. He likes Usk; he wishes intensely that you would become the man’s wife.”

“Put it this way, if you please: that I should become the Countess of Usk and Casilear.”

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Mrs. Renshawe nodded. "The double earldom, the two baronies, the excessively ancient lineage—it all attracts, it all carries weight. And then, Rupert has made the most searching inquiries. This man, still scarcely forty-one, is in the best English sets. He is even rich, as well."

"Not so rich but that he'd like to be a great deal richer," Marian mockingly retorted. "Rupert has hinted to me of 'settlements,' after the English fashion." Pain seemed to stiffen her lips, contracting their corners. "Oh, that is not all! Rupert has given some promise of a great amount to Usk, provided I am won over. You can't deny this, Kate. Your husband, my brother, is trying to sell me. There's no other word."

Mrs. Renshawe knew very well that there was no other word. She remembered, too, that Marian had not only divined this, but that her own lips had once—during a turbulent dispute—more than half-confessed it. She was not, by nature, a cold woman; the ossifying selfishness and pretension of her surroundings had done evil work

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with a spirit that elsewhere might have maintained recipiency to the light and warmth of fine ideals. She truly pitied Marian, as it was; but a stern acquired worldliness forbade her to regard the young widow's posture as other than quixotic, despite its honesty.

"Everything, Marian, can be called harsh names. I'm sure that Rupert, whom neither you nor I could consider faultless, would detest clouding your future."

"I prefer to work out my own future. It is mine; it belongs to me."

"I wish most sincerely that in every sense it did. But you forget, and I must remind you, my dear——"

"Oh, you needn't remind me!" struck in Marian, with each word a sort of throb. "When Arthur died he left me quite dependent on my step-brother."

"Step-brother? You cast a bitter hint, there. Still, I see—I see." And Mrs. Renshawe moodily nodded. "He will be very angry if you throw

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Usk over. I don't know just what he will do. I fear, though, that his treatment may flavor to you of tyranny. Not for an instant will I deny that ambition—snobbery, if you please—prompts him. He likes the idea of such a connection. But he will justify his liking of it by the assertion that you prefer to hug a morbid illusion instead of marrying one of the most cultivated and attractive of English peers."

Marian arose. In the great, half-lighted room her pallor wore a spectral sweetness. She went over to Mrs. Renshawe and took her hand.

"Good-night, Kate. Our lord and master will be coming home soon. I somehow can't meet him to-night. He never stays late at those big dinners, and it's getting late now. Of course I've seen for an age past that he thinks my deathless love for my dead husband 'a morbid illusion.' " She let her sister-in-law's hand drop, and slowly turned away. "If he sends me into the streets because I won't re-marry, why, then, I must go there—that's all." She spoke faintly,

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but without the least vocal tremor. "You may tell him this, if you please. Matters have reached a crisis, I suppose. But I won't blench or flinch —nothing can make me."

Afterward, as she went up-stairs to her own room, a vague sound, hardly louder than the creak of a twig in stillness, fell from her lips.

"I wonder if it would be possible for me to bring it about. I might try—I might try. So many stranger things have happened. I mean to try."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE RENSHAWES.

MRS. RENSHAWE did not often "sit up" for her husband. They were not an affectionate couple. She herself had not softened with the years, but he had grown iron-like; and she had watched the process in him with primal alarm and ultimate indifference. She had seen him rise from an ordinary broker to the head of a banking-house. Never a liberal man, possession had manted him, as so often happens, with a relative miserliness. He counted his dollars, she often told him, as carefully as he had once counted his dimes. His best friend could only say of him that he performed his charities in secret. He was willing to spend largely on conspicuous things. His houses were of the handsomest, like his

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equipages and horse-flesh, and his wife had some striking jewels. But she was always complaining about the slenderness of her private purse, and affirming that she was the worst "sent out" woman of any in town who held a place equaling her own.

Occasionally she would fling him a jibe on the subject of his step-sister. Was there ever a loverlier woman than Marian? and what a pittance was given her to dress on!

But still oftener she wrangled with him concerning their son and only child, Gregory. Because his tastes did not run toward railway stocks and ledgers, he, too, must be treated with injustice. Had he not gone to Oxford and made his mark there, at the paternal wish? Was he not good-looking in marked degree? To call him conceited and snobbish was merely to misapply terms. He held himself with becoming self-esteem. He was a very intellectual young man, and he would one day be a great painter. Several famous French artists had told him so. And

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yet he wasn't allowed even to go to Paris. He had to work in a shabby little studio here—he, the son of a man who could give him twenty thousand a year and scarcely be aware of it. And all because he couldn't—not wouldn't, but couldn't—tie himself down to the dreary drudgery of a Wall-street counting-house. If he had vices, the miserable monthly sums doled out to him would be excusable. But his life was all purity, fastidious refinement, artistic impulse.

Thus they had wrangled again and again. She was waiting for her husband now, but with no desire or aim to begin old disputes. Just before he had gone to the big dinner he had hurriedly told her that he had been called on, at his office, by Leander Troop. But he was late, and had glanced at his watch and hurried away, adding, with a little disgusted grimace: "I'll tell you about him when we next meet."

So curiosity kept her seated for a few minutes longer. But when she heard steps in the outer

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hall they turned out not to be her husband's. Gregory, her son, entered instead.

"My dear boy," she said, rising and kissing him, "I thought your dinner with your artist friends hadn't kept you so late as this."

"You supposed me slumbering benignly upstairs, mamma? Well, you were wrong. Those three young Frenchmen were too fascinating for that. I took them from Delmonico's to my studio, and we smoked cigarettes and talked of the latest things the newest men had been painting. Their fluent French, their torrents of enthusiasm, their prodigious belief in themselves hypnotized me. Fourth avenue became the Rue de Vaugirard, and Union Square transformed itself into the Parc de Luxembourg. Once more I was in Paris, conscious of a portly, black-eyed *concierge* at her post down-stairs, while all the door-knobs became the size of a walnut and the shape of an egg."

"You speak of the Faubourg St. Germain, Gregory. But you were never bohemian."

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"In Paris all painters are bohemian—till they become famous."

He smiled as he said this, and the smile showed his small, shapely teeth below a slim arch of mustache whose ends pointed upward. Evening dress became his tall, supple figure, the white waistcoat making little creases at the flexible waist. He had curly and silky hair, cut short, that receded at the temples, giving him the look one sees in portraits of Byron, a look from which the slim yet rounded throat and lean, sloping jaws by no means detracted. His mother thought him the most beautiful young man in the world, and there were others who shared her admiration, though within limits decidedly more sane.

"But you would never live that sort of life, Gregory; it isn't in you to live it. You would always be above it——"

"And yet of it," he interrupted. "Ah, that's my dream! Leisure to paint a single picture every three years, and then tear the canvas in shreds if I didn't absolutely approve it; leisure

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to talk of art more than I created in it, and to read of it more than I talked about it; leisure to be at once a patron of it and yet a reverent pupil; leisure to despise its trafficking side and yet to aid and encourage its worthy devotees. Two or three masterpieces would be all I should ever dream of achieving; yet the amiable years of which these would be productive I should pack with the rarest experiences life can afford."

This monologue entranced his mother. But she pretended to fault it, and tapped him sharply on the shoulder.

"I'm afraid your 'leisure' is only a pretty and egoistic synonym for great personal wealth."

"I want great personal wealth," retorted Gregory, "and I hope some day to have it." He twirled himself lightly round on his heels, with an airy waving of both arms. And this jaunty gyration brought him in full view of his father, who stood outlined against the dark hangings of a near doorway.

"It's time I told you straight out, my young

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coxcomb," said Rupert K. Renshawe, with flinty sternness, "that unless your silly ways are much mended you'll never get any great personal wealth from me."

Gregory folded his arms, drooped his head a little, and looked fixedly at his mother.

"Rupert," she fluttered, "the boy had no idea you were present. Of course he didn't mean—"

"I meant every word," struck in Gregory. He now looked fixedly at his father, though not in the least mildly.

With his father he had undergone hot quarrels in the past. Blows on one side had been threatened if not actually given. There was once a really terrible scene, and it had taught them both the better wisdom of self-control, though Gregory's native share of this quality, far exceeding his father's, had saved the situation from lurid and tragic results.

Renshawe gnawed his lips. "Oh, I don't doubt it, sir. But some day you'll be sorry."

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"I'm sorry now," said Gregory, thinking coolly what an ample but majestic person his father appeared, and how well Sargent or Bonnat could touch him up in a portrait, deftly tailored like this, with his gray-dappled beard, shaggy eyebrows and high, curved nose. "I'm sorry that you should seldom meet me without some rude jibe or vexing bit of abuse."

"You alluded to my death, sir, when you said that you expected one day to have great personal wealth."

"Not at all," contradicted Gregory. "There are other ways of getting it."

"You mean marriage, I suppose."

"I made no special allusion to it," said Gregory, with icy repose.

"Now, you must admit that he did not!" Mrs. Renshawe shot in, gliding to her husband's side.

"Oh, I know," grumbled the banker, repelling her outstretched hand. "He told me, once, that if I cut him off he would——"

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"Never mind the past, Rupert," his wife pleaded.

But Renshawe went inexorably on. "He told me that if I cut him off in my will he would find plenty of New York lawyers who would like nothing better than to break it after my death."

"Oh, why drag up old bickerings?" wailed Mrs. Renshawe.

"Good-night," said Gregory, in colorless monotone, and he immediately passed from the drawing-rooms by a rear door.

And then new bickerings began between his parents. After all, Mrs. Renshawe declared to her lord, he treated Gregory with only a little less tyranny than he treated her. She hadn't half enough gowns for Newport in the coming Summer—and her husband worth ten millions, at the very lowest figure! She'd already half decided not to go to Newport at all this year. She'd prowl off to some stagnant little hole, with a sun-shade and two small trunks. Only the other day that spiteful hag, Mrs. Whitewright, had smirked

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to her: " You always look so well in your green gown." Actually she'd worn it seven or eight times that Winter. " Your green gown!" It was too sickening! Everybody would understand why she stayed away from Newport. But she didn't care; she had grown desperate.

Very reluctantly, almost an hour after midnight, she succeeded in wringing a promise from her husband that her allowance should be appreciably increased. " But in six months," he muttered, " you'll be grumbling just the same, and wanting at least a thousand a year more."

Though flushed with victory and feeling how impolitic were her next words, Mrs. Renshawe half-tearfully taunted him: " A thousand a year more! You don't spend half your income; you probably don't spend a third. Why should you go on hoarding? It's too absurd, and it's too melancholy! Just for this once, in the name of common sense, explain, Rupert, explain!"

But he could not explain—or would not. The old curse of Midas was on him. Money had

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long ago ceased to mean what it could buy. He sometimes had desires to be deep down in the earth, within the walls of some sealed room, with all his possessions turned into gold, and there to plunge his arms in depths of coin, clutch handful of them, bathe in them his naked body, feel their myriad chilly little caresses fondle his flesh. But of such longing he was fiercely ashamed, and hid it, like some secret insanity—which, indeed, it was. He could not explain, and so turned away from his wife with a haughty scowl. But just as he was leaving her, Mrs. Renshawe remembered her motive for having awaited him.

“Oh, you said that young Troop came to see you to-day. What is he like?”

“Like?” jeered Renshawe, pausing. “He’s like a car conductor, a hotel porter, an Eighth-avenue shopkeeper.”

“So bad as that?”

“Worse, if you please.”

“And to-day we went to his sisters’, Marian and I. They seemed to me horribly coarse. But

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I admit they're pretty. Still nobody who is anybody would endure them."

"Money goes a long distance nowadays," her husband replied, "but such a fellow as this Leander Troop might have the income of a million a minute and yet find society at odds with him. Luckily, the season is over, and we're soon going out of town. So all entertainment—even though he's banking with me to a very large extent—needn't be thought of." He was again leaving the room, when he paused once more. "You're going up, I suppose. Shall I turn out these lights?"

"Yes, please."

And while the room grew dimmer and dimmer, till only one light from the outer hall was left to guide them, she heard his voice frigidly continue:

"By the way, I hope you've had time to speak again with Marian, and I hope she's come to her senses regarding a certain matter."

"She hasn't, Rupert. She never will."

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With repressed belligerence he answered her through the dimness: "Very well. Take her this message, please. Usk means to remain here through the Summer. He won't sail till early October. But if she stays obstinate till that time, what I'm now giving her—every penny of it—shall be withdrawn. She can have her room with us, and she can feed at our table, but there it shall end. Perhaps you may feel like clothing her and supplying her with pin-money. I certainly sha'n't."

Mrs. Renshawe made no answer. She had, indeed, none to make. For though far less cruel than Marian's brother, she sympathized rather warmly with his aggrieved and indignant views.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MARIAN TAKES CHARGE.

"I've ordered a box at the opera," said Leander, suddenly appearing before his sisters one afternoon three or four days later.

"What kind of a box did you say?" asked Lola, wide-eyed.

"Of course you know," reproved Ernestine; and, after a moment, Lola did understand, blushing at her own slowness.

"It ain't the regulation time for opera," Leander pursued, "but this is an extra night. I had to give a lot of money for the box, but that don't matter. It's to-morrow night."

"Oh, I'm crazy to hear it!" said Ernestine, fervently. "What's the opera, Lee?"

"I don't know. One of those rigmaroly Eye-talian names."

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"Perhaps it's 'The Bohemian Girl,'" hazarded Lola. "But that ain't Eyetalian, is it? Don't you remember Erne, how ma used to tell us about 'The Bohemian Girl'? She heard it with pa in 'Frisco, and cried ever so. I hope they won't have anything to make us cry. I hope it'll be something cheerful and funny."

"Lola don't feel very well," said Ernestine, smoothing her sister's lovely, luminous hair.

"Homesick, eh?" smiled Leander. But the smile swiftly faded from his lips. "Well, girls, I tell ye how it stands with me. I'm homesick, too. It ain't poor ma—no, she's all right. It's about Annie Shelton. I walk round the city, but I don't see a young woman that compares with her. I see 'em better dressed, and all that." He began to roam the room as if it were the city he had just mentioned. "She's only a shoemaker's daughter, but I don't care."

"Why should you care?" flashed Ernestine. "You ought to have asked her, Lee, before you left. You know you ought!"

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"Perhaps he did," said Lola. "I hope you did, Lee?"

"No, I didn't. I guess I would, though, if she'd come to the deepow that morning with all the others. But she didn't come to the deepow." Here Leander gloomily lowered his head.

"Write to her, Lee," suggested Lola.

"I dunno if I will or won't," muttered Leander. "But I feel just now as if I'd like her to write to me."

"Ain't that just like a man?" exclaimed Lola to Ernestine, as their brother sauntered into the next room. The two girls felt weary and depressed. They had taken long drives; they had seen Central Park, and admired it immensely; they had drunk in all the spectacular effects wrought by the Brooklyn Bridge; they had been shown the imposing homes of the principal plutocrats; they had explored Old Trinity, and read some of the epitaphs on its mouldering tombstones; they had craned their necks in wonderment at the most wildly audacious of the sky-

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scrapers; they had surveyed the lordly up-town boulevards; they had made acquaintance with all that was worth seeing and a great deal that was not, sometimes accompanied by their brother and sometimes alone together.

But they had both felt keenly the bewildering strangeness of their encompassment. Loneliness, too, already weighed on them. Such multitudes of people, and not a familiar face! They were both by nature gregarious; and yet isolation stared at them from every side. As if to aggravate this tedium, scores of letters came with every mail, begging letters, chiefly, but some veiling so ill their mercenary incentives that the effect was a blend of amusement and disgust.

They felt that they ought to return the visits of Mrs. Renshawe and Mrs. Warrender, and yet they shrank from this with a new and mortifying bashfulness. Marian, they had both greatly liked. They longed to see her again, and yet were afraid of the fresh light her mere presence would cast on deficiencies in themselves.

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These deficiencies they but vaguely discerned; they were ignorant of their own ignorance; its limits eluded them; all their knowledge of the great world, as both had begun half-frightenedly to decide, was blurred and befogged feebleness.

And so, the next afternoon, when Marian's card was brought up to them, they received her in mingled joy and alarm. But they never forgot that second visit. It sounded new notes in their young spirits that forever afterward echoed there.

It was true that Marian had the art of charming in rarest degree. She was one of those women who are really born popular. It was not her beauty, it was not her manner, or the little wavings of her hands when she spoke, the pensive mesmerism of her eyes, the tiny daybreak of her smile, the dimple here, the curve there, the fluty laugh, the mobile eyelids, the sudden seriousness, like shadows over grass; it was all these, and yet it was something more. You could define its elements, but the subtle enticement of their

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mixture escaped you. To grasp it was to capture a fragrance and stay it with gyves.

Marian found herself, before long, amazed at her own audacities. The girls told her that they were going to the opera that evening, and she was presently asking what frocks they would wear. This brought with it an atmosphere of familiarity in which the girls delighted; it loosened the stringency of things—their lovely goddess had descended from her cloud.

Hats? Oh, no, Marian assured them, they mustn't think of wearing hats. Nobody did, at the opera—and in a box it would look especially out of place. And their frocks—they wouldn't mind letting her see them?

The frocks were brought, and Marian vehemently shook her head. Oh, no! These dark, heavy silks, high-necked and long-sleeved! Why, the weather had grown quite warm. Hadn't they anything white and thin and fluffy? After a little delay, Ernestine returned from another room, rather red-faced, with an armful of some-

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what gauzy garments. They were not tumbled, for the girls were good packers, and after Marian had searchingly examined them she declared that they would do.

"But we'll freeze to death," said Lola. She said it with a droll, reverential accent, as though freezing to death wouldn't prove, after all, so dreadful a fate, providing this lovely lady really recommended it.

"Oh, no, you won't. The opera house will be warm, and you'll have your cloaks, of course."

"Cloaks!" Ernestine faltered. "We haven't got any."

"Too bad," Marian mused. Suddenly her face brightened, and she looked at her little gold watch, chequered with diamonds, a gift from her brother after she had emerged from widow's mourning and before the advent of Lord Usk. "I have it, girls." The "girls" charmed them, as it flowed from her lips with earnest naturalness. "There's a large shop not far from here, and it doesn't close till six o'clock. We've quite

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a while to spare, if we go to it in a cab—one of you, I mean, with me. They have very pretty opera-cloaks there—just of the sort to suit us, ready-made.” Then Marian hesitated. “ But they’re expensive.”

“ Oh, bother the expense!” said Lola. “ You go, Erne, and bring a big wad of bills along with you. Oh, ain’t this lady kind to give herself so much trouble!”

The departure soon took place, and Lola was surprised at the quickness of Marian’s and her sister’s return. They brought back their purchases with them in the cab. Lola uttered glad cries when these were spread forth. One cloak was white and gold, one white and silver, both triumphs of taste. They had secured some dainty adornments in chiffon, too, and some evening gloves and white shoes, Ernestine knowing well the size of her sister’s hand and foot.

“ Why, you’re just like the fairy godmother in ‘Cinderella.’ ” Lola gleefully said to Marian, longing to put both arms about her neck and

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kiss one of her delicate cheeks, and wondering if at some time in the very remote future she would enjoy such a privilege.

“Oh, no, I’m not,” laughed Marian. “The fairy godmother gave something valuable. I’m only giving a little commonplace advice. And now about your hair,” she went on, reflectively. “I suppose you’ve no jewels. No? Well, never mind; you won’t need them. But your hairs are not right,” she decided, heedless of the perilous plural. “They must go up—up like mine. Pardon me, but if you wear them so with those cloaks, people will say you look dowdy. This is what I mean—see.” She had unpinned her hat, and now displayed an elaborate coiffure, puffed and pyramided into the latest requirement of fashion.

“There are hairdressers whom we could send for, of course,” pursued Marian, “but a first trial of one, no matter how skilled he or she may be, is often disappointing. Let me think. Now, do you know? I could play hairdresser for you

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both if you'd only let me. I've a certain handiness that way; it comes to some women without taking a lesson. And I could save much time for you as well, so that you might dine comfortably before beginning to dress. When I really feel that I can do anything like this, I'm pretty sure to do it quickly. My brother and my sister-in-law are in Newport to-night. They've gone there to look after matters connected with their Summer residence. I sha'n't, therefore, be missed at home. It's quite dreadful, isn't it? for me to ask if I may stop and dine with you! I think you told me that your meals are served privately? All the better, for then you can calculate your time with greater nicety, and hurry off to dress at a minute's notice, or seat yourselves at table in sacques or wrappers. And after I've had my bite and sup with you—which I intend to earn, this time, as pure wages—I can help you to dress; I can put on some of the finishing touches."

Here Marian stopped short, her face wreathed in those smiles that were always the more be-

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witching because of some graver background across whose starlight their sparkles would seem to flicker. "But if in any way this plan should displease you," she repeated, "pray be quite frank about telling me."

It was only, with both sisters, a question of telling how greatly the plan pleased them. Marian had seen that they had each abundant hair, but when they had unloosened it in a neighboring bed-chamber, she was surprised at the length of Ernestine's dusky locks and the flossy fulness of Lola's fair ones.

"Yours will be the harder to do," she informed Lola, "for your hair is curly, dry and a little rebellious. So I'd better begin with you first."

Laughingly the girl gave herself into Marian's hands, while Ernestine, hearing steps in the room they had just quitted, went out to join her brother, and astonish him with an account of the fairy godmother's momentous advent.

## CHAPTER IX.

### MANAGING LEANDER.

BUT Leander by no means enjoyed her recital. He soon denounced Marian as a busybody, and shrank in scornful dismay from the prospect of playing escort to a pair of hatless and pale-robed companions. The two new cloaks were lying on a chair, and when Ernestine showed them to him he gave a grim guffaw. Such flummery as that! They'd both look like circus-riders. He'd a good mind not to go at all. Whereupon Ernestine sent him a scathing look, the tragedy of which was not decreased by the sudden detachment of her hastily pinned-up hair. Mrs. Warrender was a perfect angel, and he ought to be ashamed of himself. Instead of feeling grateful to her, he carried on like this. They had often had their

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quarrels, and they were on the verge of one now. Shame of having Marian overhear them if they lost their tempers alone curbed Ernestine's more militant sallies. A little of the praise that she showered on Marian, her brother had already heard, but now the full tide of it that flowed from her woke in him the most hostile prejudice.

He had passed a very unpleasant afternoon, either roaming the streets or calling on certain old or young men formerly resident in Stratton. All these appeared to him in a new light. This huge, imperious, indifferent city had stamped them with its repelling hall-mark. Once or twice he had suspected that he was being made fun of. They all seemed to him "airy." The entire metropolis addressed him in terms of "airiness." His pride of purse had grown so over-weening that he craved obeisance, even servility. He totally failed to understand that his uncouthness made the very fact of his enormous wealth ridiculous. He had yet to learn that he had arrived in a place where



*"Isn't it too perfectly elegant?"*



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thousands of well-bred people would refuse him their acquaintanceship while his manners remained thus piteously unmended. Then, too, the sweet, reproachful face of Annie Shelton kept haunting heart and brain. Severance from her had set his conscience palpitating with penitent throbs; and yet, while he longed to write her and confess how every well-garbed young woman whom he met appealed to him only as a mockery of her own demure, native simplicity, the high-falutin self-esteem in which he was steeped kept vetoing so humble an overture.

Presently Lola, all vainglory and ecstasy, came dancing into the room. "Isn't it too perfectly elegant?" she cried, whirling herself about, first before one mirror, then before another. She had always been pretty, but she had never till now seemed pretty in a patrician way. It was wonderful how her coloring, like that of some plump divinity in a fresco, suited its pinkness and pearliness to this unwonted lifting, coiling and puffing of her bright tresses.

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Ernestine assured her that she was magnificent, and at once rushed off to be beautified, if possible, in a like manner by Marian's nimble fingers. But the stolid, irreverent look of Leander followed her; and she felt that Lola was destined to take up her own dropped cudgels, and wield them against her brother with less restraint than she herself had shown.

While Marian was at work once again, Ernestine thought it best to be prudently confidential. She said pleasant things about her brother, and yet explained that he took strong dislikes, very often, at a moment's notice. Then she dwelt on his aversion to her own and Lola's change of attire. "He's never impolite to ladies, Mrs. Warrender," she gave assurance. "He was always thought gallant and good-natured with 'em at Stratton. But you mustn't be surprised if he behaves a little queer and sulky at dinner." And after this, Ernestine ventured on a few revelations concerning Annie Shelton.

Immediately Marian became interested. She

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did not find it at all hard to extract the whole simple and sad little story. Annie's absence from the station, that morning, struck her as a very proper bit of feminine dignity. How many girls as poor as Ernestine described her would thus have deported themselves to men so royally moneyed? Lots of girls here in the East, who would treat Annie with high disdain if they met her, might well profit by her modest self-respect. Marian delighted in anything that related to a fine and high love between man and woman. She liked nothing so much as to hear about a genuine passion. She had quickly perceived that Annie loved Leander just for himself. If it had been otherwise, she would have gone to the train that morning. Ambition would have dragged her there. As it was, a bleeding heart must have kept her away.

"I am afraid," she reflected, while the dark strands of Ernestine's heavy but supple hair yielded to her adroit manipulations, "that Leander and I are not going to get on at all well. But

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I must win him over. I must, and of course I can. No doubt all those horrible things Rupert said of him are true. Still, shocking manners I could forgive. But he has been shamefully shabby to a woman, and for that I feel prepared to hate him. No doubt this dinner will be an ordeal."

It was. Promptly on being introduced to Marian, Leander made up his mind to abominate her. Lola, who had been having what she would have told you was one of her worst fights with him, looked red-eyed and ate little. Ernestine tried to make her brother talk, and wholly failed. Marian, in apparent unconsciousness that he nursed wrath against her, became by degrees more successful. He was forced to answer some of her playful little questions, and she enmeshed him in a trifling argument before he grasped her intent. Then, having realized it, he hated her more than ever, while admitting to himself that she was much prettier than at first she had seemed. The argument concerned men's dress in the large East-

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ern towns, and before he was aware of its real drift, Marian had gracefully informed him that since his sisters were going to the opera in full evening gear he should be correspondingly clad; to which Leander replied that he had a dress-coat somewhere in one of his trunks, but he hadn't time to get at it that evening.

"Oh, you've only to ring for one of the hotel servants," Marian said. "He'll unpack everything for you in no time. He'd go and get you a white necktie, too, if you don't happen to have any." She gave, just here, one of her mellow laughs, not loud and not merry, but peculiarly her own. "Pray excuse my saying so, but you'll look very strange, Mr. Troop, beside your sisters, if you're not in evening dress."

Then she glanced at her watch, and nodded to each of the girls. Her grace, as she rose from the table, was not lost on Leander. A willow-bough in a light breeze could not have excelled it. "Just wait until you see your sisters," she called to him across one shoulder, from the door-

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way. "I'm sure you'll feel immensely proud of them."

Later, when Leander saw them, he certainly was. They were, indeed, two living hints of the splendid and luxurious things that money could accomplish. And this clever fairy godmother, as Lola had called her, was the expeditious author of so telling a masquerade!

Marian, however, secretly despised the results of her own craftsmanship. But she had had so slight an interval in which to exert it, and material even slighter with which to work! Meanwhile, she perceived that Leander was in evening dress. But his tie, though white, was a rumpled failure, and his coat and waistcoat, to put it charitably, were archaic. Moreover, he had on calfskin boots, and he was gloveless. But never mind; he would do—he would have to do.

She went up to his side and murmured a few thankful words to him. From this moment, he felt that he couldn't hate her any longer; and con-

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cluded, with a sense of fine resignation, that he would hereafter merely dislike her.

"It was so very good of you, Mr. Troop," Marian ended, "to grant my request. If we should ever know each other better—and I hope we shall—I'll remember your kindness all the more gratefully."

When the time of departure came, Marian asked for a seat in the Troop carriage, saying that her home was only a few streets distant, and that they could easily drop her there on their way to the Metropolitan Opera House. Ready assent was, of course, given.

"I'll happen in on you to-morrow afternoon," she said, when the carriage stopped at her brother's house, "and you'll tell me what you thought of the music. May I?"

Ernestine and Lola cried, in a single breath: "Oh yes, yes; please do!" But Leander, who stood at the carriage door, said nothing. He did not ascend the steps and ring the bell; he did not even touch his hat as Marian slipped away. This

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kind of courtesy was beyond his ken. And yet, while the wheels rattled himself and his sisters onward to the opera house, a silvery voice kept haunting him: "It was so good of you, Mr. Troop, to grant my request."

Through the noise and dusk Lola suddenly shouted to him: "Now, Lee, you'd better give in. Ain't she too lovely? Come, tell us what you think."

"I think," replied Leander, with oracular gruffness, "that we're very likely to be late." And so they were.

## CHAPTER X.

### LORD USK.

MARIAN passed indoors with an agreeable sense of privacy. She felt that she had the big house all to herself, for one evening at least. True, Gregory was there, but he seldom joined her or talked with her nowadays. She had once admired him; even, she admired him still. But of late they had not got on together. She conceded his intellect, but she ranked his nature among the spiritual povertyes. Its keynote, she had summarized, was egotism, and his mind made her think of a land all appareled in flowers, beautiful to the sight, but without the faintest breath of fragrance, and all rooted in sand.

She went up into her own large, comfortable room, and presently fell to pacing its floor. She

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had set herself to the performance of a certain task, and one the original purpose of which was indubitably selfish. To-day, she had cause to believe that she might sooner or later succeed. She was attempting it—why? Oh, let there be no self-concealments! Her motive was to escape from her stepbrother's despotism. He had sent her that hideous message. Whether he really meant it or not, she had conceived a design of ridding herself forever from any menaces of the same tormenting kind. Possibly, she was only fighting the air. But she would soon know if this were true. And, whatever rebuff came, she could always pride herself on having played no hypocritical game. It should be cards on the table. Her course would have no crafty sinuosities. She wished that she might speak out to-morrow. But it would not be many to-morrows before the Troops either took her terms or rejected them.

When in the midst of these contemplations, a knock came and a card followed, she felt harshly

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disturbed. Effort had tired her, and she had intended soon to seek her bed. But it was still early, and she swiftly guessed that Lord Usk had chosen this night to visit because of a certainty that no interruptions might occur. The "evening call" was now as old-fashioned as South Fifth avenue or Bleeker street. Perhaps her brother had advised it before leaving town. Usk might have come for a final answer. However, he had come for so many final answers, and had received so many, while she poured him tea of an afternoon or met him at crushes, nocturnal and the reverse, why should he seek to make himself the recipient of still one more? Marian went down-stairs to meet him, in a mood at once weary and indignant.

"Brighten up the front drawing-room," she said to the servant who preceded her, and deliberately waited until she felt sure this order had been obeyed.

He approached her promptly, with outstretched hand. Into this hand she put her own for the briefest instant.

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" You think it strange? " he asked.

" What? " she asked back, blankly.

" Oh, this sort of a coming."

" It is odd." She sank into the nearest chair, and he seated himself at her side, closer than she wished.

" But I wanted to find you alone," he explained, with an air of brooding mildness.

He was a tall, thin man, with an auburn mustache and a look in his lean face as if winds and suns had swept and tanned it. His small eyes were a lucid drab, with dead-black lashes. He had long, slender, sinewy hands and long calfless legs. He was very well-dressed at all times, and his hard, spare body was of the sort that the fashions of our period specially suit.

" Of course, you know why I wanted to find you alone," he continued.

He sat loungingly, his slim body—with its waist like a woman's—pushed toward her, his legs crossed, and both hands, tipped with their



*"'You think it strange?' he asked."*



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glossy, filbert nails, fumbling at his thready watch-chain.

"Oh, I suppose I know why," Marian tossed off, with a bored kind of civility. She liked his society as much as that of any man she knew, provided he would avoid one topic. He had intellect, great knowledge of women, a tint of languid, yet clear wit in his talk and a good deal of solid mental culture. His familiarity with a world round which he traveled twice would now and then crop out with striking vividness.

"You think I mean to put the old question, Marian," he said. "Well, I do."

"It's quite idle."

"You're still marble, then?"

"Oh, I'm common clay."

"That's encouraging; clay may be softened."

"Not in my case." She gave him a brief, direct look, and in her beautiful eyes and sensitive lips arraignment and entreaty were equally blent. "I've told you so often that I will never, never

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marry again. I haven't much faith, as you're aware. Sometimes I have absolutely none. But often, usually in the dead of night, Arthur seems to come and hold my hand. He seemed to come like that last night. The room was pitch-dark. Just for a second I believed that he really was there. 'Be firm,' the silence itself said to me. I wasn't afraid; I longed for a light, however faint, and a presence, however vague. Then the whole feeling vanished. But, if I had not had it, I should not have felt any less firm to-day. I am always firm; I never waver. You call it morbid; so does my brother. I can't help what you call it——”

“ You don't care,” he said, in tones loaded with rebuke.

“ It is not possible for me to care.”

“ Because you do not love me? Because you are waiting?”

She gave an exasperated little smile. “ How often have you said that? It is horribly rude of you to say it again. Hundreds of women would

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be very angry. For that matter, I am angry——”

“ No; you’re not angry, for you can’t help being pitiful. And why? You are certain that I’m in love with you.”

“ I—I do believe you,” she said, staring at the lap of her gown and making nervously with her fingers a few zigzag creases there. Then, on a sudden, she raised her eyes and drove their rays daringly into his own. “ Granted you like me very much, granted you’re very much in love, and all that, but you would not marry me without a *dot* from my brother. You want me, Lord Usk, but you want that to go with me. I’m inflexible about your getting me on any terms. Nevertheless, though you have money yourself, perhaps a very great deal of it, you’re bent on winning more when you win me.”

She saw his face cloud, and the teeth flash between his parted lips. But she went straight on.

“ I don’t blame you. It’s your national way. My brother has made you a large offer—oh, you

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needn't lift your hand in protest; I'm very certain that he has done so. I'm to be pauperized if I don't accept you before the Autumn. I won't accept you, I won't accept any man; so you'll have neither the dame nor the dower. You must do without both, and if you care to sit here and talk of things that do not concern your marrying me, I'm quite acquiescent. Otherwise, with no really discourteous intentions, I must beg of you to take the only alternative left."

"With no 'discourteous intentions'! You heap insult on me while applauding your own politeness!"

"How can you call it insult? I've never spoken to you before of any understanding between Rupert and yourself. But I am confident that he has made you pecuniary promises. Why? Because I know him, and I know you. Come, now; are you prepared to give me your word of honor that I am wrong?"

Lord Usk rose. She saw that he was greatly agitated, but she did not think that wrath was by

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any means all the cause of his disarray. Her sheer boldness had checkmated him. She watched his slow walk toward the door, and wondered if he would cross the threshold without any pause before reaching it.

He did pause. " You have chosen a clever way of giving my final dismissal."

But she was instantly his match. " I gave it you, in that sense, months ago. You never could have married me, but it isn't pleasant to hear that you tried to buy me with your titles."

" Have I admitted that?" he queried, with fierceness, turning on her.

" Yes."

" How?"

" By your inability to state that you haven't bargained for me with my brother."

He drew out a handkerchief from his shirt-cuff, and crushed its folds against his lips.

" Inability? You call silence inability?"

" Yes."

" Is not that most arbitrary?"

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"No, no; not in the least. You would rush to a denial if you could. But you can't, for my charge is a true charge."

Quite composed, considerably bored, she sat awaiting his answer. It soon came: his lordship of Usk and Casilear left the house.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A LITTLE OF THE PAST.

Not only the next day did Marian drop in on the Troops, but many a day afterward she sought them, through the witching weather that for once, at least, blessed New York with a really vernal May.

Wondrous were the changes that she wrought, and with no seeming strain; there lay the marvel of her wizardry. Counsel flowed from her with so deft an accompaniment of amusing discourse that, even if the girls had felt inclined to resent being lessoned, they could not have denied their instructor's engaging method. But, as it was, they took her slightest suggestion on trust, enchantedly. She gave free rein to all her powers of fascination.

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And yet she made them certain that no duplicity underlay her halcyon mood of mentorship. They swiftly began to adore her for this very reason; they felt that she rang true. Now and then it occurred to them that she had some sort of confession to utter, some sort of interpreting story to tell. But they were patient, often carelessly so. It was of course peculiar, as Leander would sometimes grumble, that so modish and aristocratic a lady should give them such a large share of her leisure. But he, too, was now definitely under the spell; his complaints and suspicions were becoming dulled by its influence. He thought less of what she might be "up to," and more of the sweet captivations that she exerted. He did not see her, by any means, as often as did his sisters; he was sensible, notwithstanding, of a force brought to bear on him—a new force, full of subtle suasions. With astonishment, he watched his sisters yield to it. And yet there was nothing remarkable in their rapid acceptance. It was what we have now grown to

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call an old tale—the exceptional teachableness of the young American women. Both the girls, for example, would sometimes, at table, make their knives do the duty of forks. Marian with a tact all her own, soon banished this habit into the dust-bins of perpetual exile. Other fatal little foes of taste soon followed the path of this greater one. Reckless trips and slips in grammar, she weeded from their speech with an expedition that surprised herself, forgetting that her own personality supplied a constant model, an objective aid, that consortied admirably with the oral precept.

Though not realizing it, she had established a kind of miniature kindergarten; for these two gladly subservient pupils, despite the youth of their gentle taskmistress, were not seldom placed toward her in attitudes of childish recipiency.

A revolution in dress was speedily completed. Two maids of the most trustworthy character, at wages that Marian insisted should not exceed their previous payment from mistresses less

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wealthy, were engaged and set at work. The girls still measurably retained their Western vocal "burr," but, again, it surprised their vigilant friend that so much nasal harshness should so soon have become softened.

"You go there all the time," said Mrs. Renshawe one day. "Rupert is asking why, as a matter of course. I suppose you know that we leave for Newport early in June. That isn't far off. Rupert is very angry with you, Marian. But he hasn't given you up."

"Given me up, Kate?"

"Oh, you understand, my dear. Lord Usk will spend a week or two with us in June. He, too, is very angry with you. I hope you haven't cut him. He tells your brother, and Gregory also, that you were quite dreadful to him on a certain evening when he called."

"I told him the truth," said Marian. "If he thought that dreadful, I can't help it."

Just then Gregory came lounging into the room. "How are your flock of sheep, my shep-

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herdess aunt?" he inquired, saucily merry. "Oh, don't deny that you have one, there at the Waldorf-Astoria. Dear old Usk wants to see it, and so do I. Why can't we lunch or dine with your Troops, just once, as you do almost every day? We'd both promise to be very nice. Usk and I saw you yesterday driving with the girls, but you pretended you didn't see us. They're really quite pretty. I almost fell in love with the blond one. You've been wonderful. They never got those delightful togs out on the Pacific slope. And what a taste you have, auntie, in hats! But I didn't dream you could achieve such miracles with horse-flesh. Usk says those two roans, going along like cats, trained to perfection, with their superb heads and legs, must have cost a thousand apiece; and Usk, like most Englishmen of his class, is an authority on horses, as you know. Then the trappings, too—the livery and all that—we agreed that they were positively ducal. One thought of Hyde Park at half-after six on a June evening."

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"Mr. Troop," said Marian, "knows a great deal about horses."

"Oh, does he?" Gregory gave a loud laugh, his laugh was always musical. "But not that kind, if you please. They don't largely congregate on the other side of the Rockies. And the coachman and footman—twin Apollos, visibly beloved, if you'll pardon my shameless pun, of the British Mews! Such a creation from the brain of Leander Troop—never! You may have got somebody to spend his dollars with such sublime tact, or you may have spent them so yourself. But the young man who offered father—as I heard—a seventy-five-cent cigar, and referred flatteringly to our fine mansion on Seventh avenue! Grapes don't grow from thistles, auntie, with quite so startling a speed. Money may have its necromancies, but they're not quite so lightning-like."

"Use your common sense, Gregory," said his kinswoman. "I could no more have selected that whole equipage for Mr. Troop than I could have

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cut one of his new coats. You may not meet him at any of your smart clubs, but he has got to know certain men of a rather sporting turn. I did see, in company with one of his sisters, the carriage and the horses before they were put together. I was asked about the livery, too, and even the harness. But I attempted to pass no final judgments, and if my suggestions were heeded in the way of ultimate choice it must have been because Miss Troop valued them, and hence influenced her brother in their adoption. The godlike coachman and footman were no doubt lucky accidents. I had observed them as two clean-shaven men of good appearance, but escaped your enthusiasm, nevertheless."

Gregory slapped one hand against the other, in soundless applause. "Deliciously non-committal auntie! The Sphinx was imprudent compared with you. And shall we never solve the problem of your mysterious cult? I'm so tired of groping in darkness. I feel like pleading to you, on my knees and *à bras ouverts*, for a feeble gleam of

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light. Poor Usk slowly perishes with jealousy. But, alas! of whom to be jealous he doesn't yet discern; nor do I; nor does mamma, yonder. We've all known your sympathies with the poor. But the rich—the stupendously rich, at that! Of course a diamond-mine wouldn't make you stoop to the young man with the seventy-five-cent cigars. And yet stranger things have happened, one must concede."

"Be quiet, Gregory," said his mother, as a wounded look crossed Marian's face. Then she tried to deflect a little the current of talk. "Your father has seen Leander Troop twice again, and is surprised at his altered manners. He has grown very much less—barbaric. He has more the air of his father, who at times, they say, came very near being an actual gentleman, though a man so thoroughly self-made."

"Self-made men always bore me," said Gregory. "One feels that in making themselves they have been so handicapped by inexperience."

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That evening, Marian was to dine with the Troops at their hotel, and she had already told herself that she needed all her nerve, since a certain prelude must end forthwith. The real drama would follow it or not, as fate decreed. People had begun to gossip about her intimacy with these Troops—what could it possibly mean? Mrs. Renshawe had repeated spiteful and ironic remarks. Gregory's riant reference to Leander as a potential key of the whole baffling secret had been a mere shadow of popular comment. And yet everybody knew that Lord Usk would fall at Marian's feet in a twinkling. This fact had made gossip divide itself.

Now you heard that she had decided against an English title in favor of huge wealth without one. Again you heard hot denial that she would ever marry an oafish young capitalist for his money alone. But Marian hated to let the fogs of enigma roll up their blinding volumes. She wanted to have this one evening clear off the atmosphere of her intention—as might a violent

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thunderstorm. If it did not—well, if it did not, then destiny was against her. But the hour had struck, and she steadied herself at its commanding summons.

All through dinner, Leander and his sisters felt conscious that she was not exactly her usual self. Toward the end of it Ernestine, assured that she had grown paler, and mindful that she had eaten but slightly, asked her if she were tired.

“Tired? Oh, no! But I expect to be soon.”

The strangeness of this answer provoked a natural surprise. Marian waited till the servants had gone, and then said, looking all about her, from face to face:

“I’m sure you thought my answer to Ernestine rather an odd one.”

“I did,” said Lola.

“And I,” said Ernestine.

“You expect soon to be tired?” Leander questioned. “How, Mrs. Warrender?”

Marian played for a moment with her small coffee-spoon. “Confessions are fatiguing,” she

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slowly returned. "At least, mine will be. And I mean to make one. You'll see why, perhaps, when I've finished it."

No one replied. Three pairs of eyes were intently watching her. After a brief while she rose from the table, and seated herself in a somewhat shadowed chair. When she again spoke, both hands lay curled quite idly in her lap; but the fluent lines of her figure had relaxed in an unwonted way, and seemed to symbolize deep eagerness and resolve.

"It's very hard to begin. But I'll make my plunge. I liked you girls when I came that day with Kate—Mrs. Renshawe, you know, I liked you, but the idea of what I wanted to do—to get from you the sanction of doing—hadn't yet entered my mind. That came later, though not much. I want to be absolutely sincere. It was not a generous impulse; it was rather a self-preservative one.

"'Here,' I said to myself 'is my chance, or at least my possible chance.' But the more I have

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seen you, Ernestine and Lola, the more I have got to feel that our close companionship would prove to me, simply in itself, a great refreshment and pleasure. There is much that I could teach you and show you. It is not vain for me to say this, and I would not say it if I thought that either of you would think it vain. I am certain that neither of you will. I am not, pray remember, even hinting that I could better you in the faintest moral sense—for in the strongest, sweetest sense you are both good and pure; you are both far above the world that fortune compels you to face. But in many ways you are not fitted to face this world; I should indeed state plainly that you have not the weapons with which to fight it. These I cannot supply through myself, but I can do something appreciable, and I can point to others whose tutelage, under my supervision, would be of striking help. For two years—longer, if you wish—I would remain your constant associate and adviser. Perhaps I am not wrong in believing that you have already grown to trust me."

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Here her voice fell, and with it her eyes. “ We trust you like a sister ! ” Ernestine said, very fervently ; and Lola gave instant echo : “ Like a sister—yes ! ”

Marian, lifted her gaze, fixed it on Leander, who watched her with an intentness unexpectedly keen.

She went on, with no visible attempt to nerve herself, though at this point in what she had chosen to call her confession, the fear of breakdown was secretly tormenting her.

“ I’ve said that my impulse was not a generous one. I’ve said that it was self-preservative. Let me now tell why. Not so long ago, when I was quite young, I met and loved my dead husband, Arthur Warrender. He was thought a good match, as the phrase runs, by my stepbrother, Mr. Renshawe, and by many others besides. He was only two years older than I ; he was handsome, well-born, rich. When I learned that he cared for me, the sun seemed to dance in the sky. And it didn’t stop dancing after marriage—as so often

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it does. I was very happy with Arthur. It lasted only two years, but it was perfect! One of those years we spent abroad. For six months of it we were in Italy. But we hardly ever went into society. We chose lonely but lovely places—a villa on the Italian Riviera, another at Val-lombrosa overlooking Florence, another still—But no matter we were sufficient unto ourselves.

“When we came back here it was the same. People laughed at us, and asked if our honeymoon was never going to end. Nothing ever ended it—nothing, I am sure, ever could have ended it—except death. And—very suddenly—for he was in perfect health almost till the very last—death did!”

Marian paused, now. Ernestine and Lola were both in tears, the latter quite audibly. Marian looked at the sisters with a bright, pained, affectionate smile, that seemed somehow to envy them their tears. Her own eyes glittered with a dry light. She had often longed to weep for the irremediable. But all that was long over. She

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would indeed have broken down to-night were it not.

"I—I was very ill for several months afterward. But when Nature had so far healed my wound that it ached much less maddeningly, I had to confront a grim fact. Perhaps you remember the great and totally unforeseen failure of Dunstan & Strallman. Arthur had been a silent partner in this wide-known firm of bankers. He had inherited the position, so to speak, from his father. And, in the ruin, every dime of his wealth was swallowed up. Before my marriage, I had been supported by my brother. Now again I was thrown on his care. For a time, all went well enough. Then the question of my second marriage rose."

"Second marriage?"

The words were so low that Marian was not at first aware who spoke them. Then it dawned on her that Leander had done so; and she perceived, moreover, that the very lines of his head and shoulders appeared now to listen alertly.

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"I say that this question rose. But I gave it immediate rebuff. Some one has wished me for his wife—I will mention no name. He still perseveres; my brother is on his side, my sister-in-law as well. I have not quarreled with Mr. Renshawe; he, rather, has quarreled with me. For he is bent, most determinedly bent, on my making this marriage. He has gone so far as to threaten me, and the threat is shockingly cruel. Unless I agree to follow his inclinations by the end of this Summer, he will simply permit me to live in his house, and that will be all. The allowance he gives me will cease from that time. My position, of course, will become pitiable; it will also become grotesque. My parents died years ago, and I have now no near relations, except Rupert. His wife will behave mercifully, I haven't a doubt; but her private purse already fails to meet the requirements of a very luxurious life, and she is constantly complaining, as it is, to a husband who was never liberal, and whose increased wealth has not made him a whit more

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lavish. One decision is terribly strong with me. The worst poverty, starvation itself, will never force me to marry again. I have been called sentimentally, sensationnally stubborn. It doesn't matter. I can't explain, and I don't blame any one for misjudgments of my course. How can others feel as I do? Their points of view are clear to me—quite pardonably clear. Mine is to them almost inevitably vague. I speak of the worst poverty—after all, that may never come. There are things I can do, places I can fill, so long as luck spares my health. And then I shall have a home, a roof over my head, while I think, plot and plan. But, for some time, an idea has haunted me that means of actual future independence are already within my reach."

Then, before Marian could speak another word, the impulsive Lola had sprung to her side. "Oh, I guess what you're going to say! You'll come and live with us! Ain't that—I mean, isn't that—too perfectly grand!"

Ernestine had followed her sister, more slowly,

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but with glowing face. Lola's last rapturous outburst was addressed to her.

"If it's only true!" she said.

"It's for you—for all three of you—to settle that," Marian answered. She colored slightly as she met Leander's eyes. "For now comes the hard, hateful business part of my queer harangue."

Here Leander rose. "You needn't say it out if it bothers you," he proposed.

Never had she heard his voice so softened. For some time past, she had noticed the gradual ebbing away of his boastful manner. But this was almost like a new Leander, speaking and moving. Just for a moment, the illusion lasted, and then the old crispness and curtness returned. Yet somehow they were veiled, as though dimness should fall on a canvas too crude of tint—as though refinement had begun covertly to replace his former swaggering vehemence.

"There's a small writing-desk in that corner,"

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he now continued. "I'll just turn on the electric light that's above it." He achieved this result in another moment. "You'll find paper, pens, pencil—all you may need—right here, Mrs. Warrender. Perhaps you'd like to make two or three short statements—about terms, I mean. Don't take any pains. Just scribble it off anyhow. Then I'll glance at it, you know."

Marian threw him a grateful glance, and murmured, "Thanks."

Her writing did not take a long while. She had everything clearly calculated in her mind. She had meant to ask a large sum, but not any wildly exorbitant one. A part of it was to be paid her each month. At the end of two years, she would have saved enough to rent herself a little house not far from town, and live modestly but securely for the rest of her life. But she would still stay on, if they wished.

Having finished, she handed her sheet of paper to Leander. He studied it for a little while.

"It won't do," he said.

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Marian felt herself crimson.

“Lee!” cried Lola, indignantly.

“How won’t it do?” demanded Ernestine.

“It’s too small,” said Leander. “It’s got to be doubled.”

“Of course it has, if Lee says so!” declared Lola, trying to look very sage.

Marian’s hand went tremulously to her throat. “No, no,” she said, in rather husky tones. “That would be like—imposition. I—could—not take so much! I—could—not come and live with you at all, unless you gave me that—only that—no more!”

Her face was full of sweetness, but into her voice had crept an accent of decision, tender and yet firm.

For the first time, she saw Leander look really abashed. Suddenly leaving her seat, she went up to him and gave him her hand.

“I thank you so very much, and I beg you to pardon me.”

Leander twisted one end of his mustache with

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great violence. "Why, there's nothing to pardon," he said. "How could there be?"

"There's everything to feel joyful for!" exclaimed Ernestine. She caught Lola in her arms, and they whirled about together, using the waltz-step that Marian had lately taught them.

## CHAPTER XII.

### AT SHAFTESBURY.

MRS. RENSHAWE turned pale when the truth was told her. “To accept a position like that when one could call one’s self the Countess of Usk and Casilear! You must be in earnest! But you know, my dear, what the world will say—that you prefer matrimonial millions to old English birth.”

Marian frowned for a second, then laughed. “You mean Leander? It’s too ludicrous! I shall slip quietly away this afternoon, Kate. I’ve only one message for Rupert—a brief one, too. He has been cruel, but I bear him no grudge.”

Afterward she spoke of certain possessions for which she would send and begged her sister-in-law to remember that she hoped their friendship would remain warm in the future, as in the past.

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To her surprise, Mrs. Renshawe completely gave way. She embraced Marian again and again. She grew tumultuous in her emotion; tears poured from her eyes, whence many a cold and haughty stare was wont to emerge.

"It was so like you to refuse that second offer they made you! Of course, they've won a grand prize, and know it. I shall never cease to miss you. I love you dearly, and I feel Rupert's brutishness with a new, fearful force. He deserves this punishment. With all his wealth, your real friends are twenty to his one. It's the same with me. You held our home together. You were the bond of it, and the star of it as well."

That night, when her husband came back to find Marian gone, he found something else very vividly present. His wife's wrath he had seen before; but now fresh vials of it were broken. To her passionate upbraidings and reproaches, he made scarcely any response. He was too stunned.

Quite soon after Marian's installation as governess in the Troop household, she went with

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Leander and his sisters on a long Northern tour that lasted several weeks. They saw Niagara and all the Great Lakes, traveling sumptuously, not seldom in private cars that Leander, as his father's son, was at times offered by politic officials.

Marian's heartbeats often quickened as she observed the pathetic way in which Ernestine and Lola clung to her. Their fondness deepened as their own dependence on her tactful counsels became more sensible to themselves. They would imitate, with a sort of reverential comedy, her gestures, her voice, her phrases, her very mode of crossing a room or entering it. Then, at whiles, they would break into laughter—far less boisterous than of old—and accuse each other of this admiring mimicry.

To all whom they met—and many people thrust acquaintance on them—Marian insisted that they should introduce her as “our governess.” She even asked of Leander that he should employ the longer formula of “my sisters’ governess;” but

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now and then she caught him disobeying her and saying simply, "Mrs. Warrender."

Some little time before the tour had ended, she began to feel certain vague qualms of concern regarding Leander. At this stopping-place or that, on the boats or cars in which they were forced to spend long intervals, a legion of women, having discovered who he was, were pleased to beam on him, to make eyes at him. His indifference appealed to her, for a time, as amusingly phlegmatic. Then there came into her mind a shadow of disquieting doubt.

Later, they held together more than a single private talk. His colloquialism lapsed, one day, into a confidential channel. He referred to Annie Shelton, of whom his listener had already learned. This drew from Marian the irrepressible questions: Did he love Annie, and did conscience really smite him for having left her without an offer of marriage?

In answering these questions, Leander palpably hung fire. It occurred to Marian that he wished

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to elicit from her sympathy rather than advice. She was prepared to give him a slight yet humane share of the first, and as much of the last as he would accept. The girls had made it very clear to her just how good and intelligent a girl Annie Shelton was.

But Leander's approaches quickly disturbed their recipient. They did not flavor enough of penitence. He had sought to speak of Annie Shelton one minute; the next it grew apparent that he had meant to use her as a kind of bridge. Inwardly recoiling, Marian feared whither this bridge might lead. Why should it not lead into just that domain of sentiment and flirtation that she had neither intention nor desire to explore? Rapidly she saw the structure built; as rapidly she determined to destroy it. And yet there must be no sharp strokes. Her place forbade that. Since her husband's death she had had to fight the same sort of fight more times than she cared to remember. Men had been persistent in spite of her chidings; Lord Usk, though an obstinate

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wooer, had scarcely ranked among the most passionate. Occasionally she had seemed to herself brutal. It would not do to take such measures now. She did not take them. She parried, while guarding against actual repulsion. Her own dexterity surprised her. It told at last, and she was left to pray that it would tell with permanence.

On their return to New York there broke out a little breeze of contest in her relations with Leander that would otherwise have distressed her. Now it brought relief. It might put them on a different footing, she reflected; it might even tear asunder that spangled gauze of romanticism in which he had seemed on the verge of investing her.

Toward her two charges it was her fixed aim to act with duty and discipline, however mildly each was administered. Every week, for example, she required that one of them should write home to her mother in Stratton, and these letters were made a medium by which apt epistolary skill could be attained.

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When they found themselves once more in the Waldorf-Astoria, it was past the middle of June, and extremely hot. Leander affirmed himself sick of hotels, and proposed that they should at once procure as large and handsome a residence as the lateness of the season would permit them to secure, in that seaside resort which both he and his sisters regarded as a social paradise.

"Newport?" said Marian. "Oh, no; pray don't think of going there."

The girls looked promptly acquiescent. Whatever Marian objected to must somehow be objectionable. Like all converts to a faith, they were ultra-ardent believers.

But Leander gave a dissentient start. "Not go there at all? Oh, that won't do."

"I'm sorry you feel it won't," said Marian.

Several hours later he chanced to meet her alone. She was tired, and told him so. She had been searching about town this hot day for a capable French instructress; it was her aim that

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a French lady should give the girls a great deal of her company; but Marian knew just the kind of person who would suit her—one of the best breeding, not too assertive, not apt to clash with her own views and intents. This person she had yet failed to find, and a morrow of wearisome search loomed before her.

"So you've put down your foot on the subject of Newport," said Leander. "Why?"

She was unbuttoning one of her gloves, and stopped short in the process. "I've not put down my foot. I've no right to do it. You're master here, not I. No doubt I spoke too abruptly. If so, forgive me. But I did not wish to speak commandingly. The truth is merely this: neither Ernestine nor Lola is yet—ready for Newport."

"Ready?" he repeated with a trace of challenge.

"Does 'prepared' sound softer? Let me be practical. You would get one of the handsome cottages, as they call their mansions. You would

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drive abroad. You might be asked to one or two of the Casino parties. But none of the right people would call on you. Ah, you smile at my terming them the right people. But I simply mean those who are Newport—those who have the vantage there, who make it the nest of exclusiveness and snobbery that it is.

“ If you want to pass a season there you must always remember that it stands for everything American life—democratic life—republican life—ought not to be. It is a boiling-point of hypocrisy, frivolity, social cruelty—but it is refined. It worships money, but it will not endure money spent without taste. Personally, I detest Newport, for it is a living negation of all the true charity and self-respect that should make human nature wholesome and human intercourse fine. Still, as a mere school of outward elegance it is worth attention. I should like the girls, at some future day, to form their own estimate of it. But it breaks my heart to think of their going there now and seeing only its insolent, arrogant, seamy

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side. I want them to wait. It would be a fatal error if they did not."

"But, helped by you——?"

"I could not help them. I know the stiff-necked grandes; I'm not unpopular with them. But my position there, as guardian and directress, would be terrible. The girls—I come back to my old word—are not ready. In another year it should be quite different."

"Too much Stratton left, I suppose," said Leander, walking toward a window and staring down at the diminished vehicles and dwarfed pedestrians.

"Put it that way, if you please."

Leander veered round. He had two valets now, and was dressed by a tailor whom large bills had stimulated into large efforts. "And how about myself?" he asked.

"You're a man. It isn't the same. You'd have your yacht and your traps. They might think—you force my candor—that there was too much Stratton left in you, but this would be said

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only behind your back; and unless you should err too boldly against their usages, they would send you their cards of invitation—even instruct their daughters to treat you most civilly."

"And I never saw one of 'em that I'd shake a stick at!" burst from Leander in quite his early manner. Then, much lower of tone, he added: "Except you." He paused a moment, then gravely continued: "I almost hated even you, at first—I can say it now—till I—well, till I got so to like you."

Before the end of June, Marian had her way. Just what she had designed to do she thoroughly carried out. They rented a charming villa in a beautiful seaside place on the New England coast, which we will call Shaftesbury. Already admirably furnished, it lacked a few artistic touches, and these were easily bestowed. Its lawns, dotted with huge hemlocks, flowed down to a craggy rampart that fierce Atlantic storms had lashed through many a Winter, as its fringy bosks of cedar showed plainly among their twisted trunks.

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The little neighboring village possessed a good harbor, which Leander, though a life-long landsman, had soon invaded with a steam-yacht of grace and girth.

Marian had meanwhile engaged precisely the sort of French governess she had seen in her visions—an elderly lady with just enough self-effacement to escape tedious humility, and speaking her native tongue as purely as she spoke English ill.

Shaftesbury was not a fashionable resort, yet by no means was it dowdy. Its chief rural hotel, rather clumsily named the Turtle Point House, was filled, each year, with quiet gentlefolk, and the villas along a mile or two of coast were mainly occupied by Boston or New York families, with a few of whom Marian found she was already acquainted. She was convinced that in her selection of Shaftesbury she had struck just the right note of semi-retirement.

The cottagers whom she had formerly known came to visit Marian. The girls, at these times, always appeared. They were judged leniently,

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and soon Marian congratulated herself on the lessening need for indulgence that their marked improvement revealed. Here, as would not have happened at Newport, they were neither stricken dumb with abashment nor afflicted by heart-aches from wounded pride. Society did not stare at them through a long-handled eye-glass over a frigid shoulder. It gave them a cordial hand, asked them to some of its unpretentious gatherings, and concealed its criticisms, whether caustic or mirthful, behind amicable smiles.

Leander would be absent on his yacht, in which he delighted, for three or four days at a time. He was seldom alone, for on his shorter cruises Marian and his sisters would often accompany him, and soon other guests were included. Once or twice he went as far as Newport with a little party of gentlemen, to most of whom Marian had introduced him. He was away like this, one evening, when a strange event occurred.

It was chilly out of doors, and Marian sat in the drawing-room, brooding over the usual little

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talk of a sagacious, instructive, yet non-perfunctory character, which she held with her wards nearly every day. Lola and Ernestine were both up-stairs, but she expected them to join her at almost any moment. Suddenly Gregory Renshawe entered.

His presence shocked Marian, but she greeted him pleasantly. "I thought you never came to Shaftesbury," she said.

"Oh, I've been here lots of times," Gregory fibbed, airily. "There's an effect of some cedars growing from a cleft in a rock, streaked with purple and white, that I've longed to paint, and have repeatedly sketched. Of course mamma told me you were here. I'm stopping at the Turtle Point. Delightful place—everything so well *ménagé*. Heaven knows I need a valet; but poor Emile had to go.

"I suppose you've heard about father's latest thunderbolt. He's been in the most horrible humor ever since you left us, dear auntie. I'm cut down lower than ever before. Two hundred

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and fifty a month—think of it! This is what he calls his ultimatum. I must either sit on a high stool and pore over a ledger six hours a day, or wallow in poverty like this! But don't think I've come down here to borrow of you, auntie. Oh, no; mamma gives me a little out of her private purse. Why didn't Shakespeare tell us how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless father? As if he oughtn't to be proud of my artistic promise and intentions."

Here Gregory heaved a sigh, and plunged one white, shapely hand through his Byronic curls. "Ah, why can't we all have such splendid revenges as yours? You've nearly given the governor an apoplexy with your superb back-handed blow. I don't doubt you're going to do marvels with the two protégées. Mamma thinks you will, and so do I. And somebody else is sure of it. I mean Usk. Do you know, he was kind enough to come with me here? Newport bores him, this Summer, he says. Oh, don't flush up

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like that. He isn't going to bother you any more. He was quite *abasourdi* by the step you took. I positively feared some sort of brain attack. Those placid men, who'd as soon wear their hearts on their sleeves as a pot-hat with a frock-coat, are just the ones liable to mental explosion. But all that sort of thing is past now with Usk. I hope you'll be nice to him when you meet, for of course he'll happen in if you let him. He's sure to try, whether I bring him or not. And isn't it just as well your girls should get a pre-monicory glimpse of so high-bred a fellow? He'll teach them unconsciously what's the real distinguished thing. His presence alone would be a sort of lesson, in its way. No man understands more drastically the whole business of conventions, niceties, aptitudes. I've heard you confess it yourself. He has all the *chatteries salonnières* at his finger ends. But he isn't going to be here long. Indeed, he talks of sailing back some time in August, now. I hope you appreciate, auntie, my pregnant little 'now.' But we won't discuss pain-

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ful topics. We'll discuss *la brune* Ernestine and *la blonde* Lola. Where are they? Not in their cribs, I hope, at this wildly early hour!"

They soon gave physical proof that they were not in their cribs. Gregory stayed till past eleven, and it was manifest to Marian that he amused them greatly. She was not pleased at his arrival in Shaftesbury, and as day followed day each became to her like a new link in a chain of troubles. Lord Usk presented himself at the villa, and though his reserved bearing gave no sign that Gregory had not described truthfully his altered frame of mind, she still nursed her doubts regarding his real motives for having accompanied her nephew. She armed herself against new pressure of his suit, but found in his tranquil courtesies no faintest reason for thus standing on guard. He sought no private conversations with her, and, indeed, seemed to select Ernestine as an object of half-paternal pleasantries. But he was so very subtle, and withal had shown himself so unflinchingly determined in former days!

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Why had he drifted here unless beneath the sway  
of some secret and impenetrable purpose?

As if to weight Marian's anxiety more heavily, Leander, returning from his last cruise, almost at once struck up an intimacy with Gregory and his lordship. Beyond a doubt, she concluded, he was encouraged by their cordial treatment. There was much in Leander to like; but did Lord Usk or her nephew perceive it? Was he the kind of associate they would have chosen spontaneously? She noticed that each, in his different way, paid a certain court to the young Croesus. Paying court to anybody, except herself, was so completely out of Usk's line! And Gregory—did he ever deign more than a nod to those whom he thought unamusing? For hours at a time, she would put, so to speak, two and two together. Obviously, Gregory was bending himself to the task of fascination, with Lola for its object. Despite her prettiness, was she a girl naturally to please his fancy? How could she understand his picturesque attitudinizings, his panoramic vag-

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ries? And yet these often made her smile, even sometimes to laugh, very heartily.

“ Usk,” Marian would fretfully muse, “ is only trifling with Ernestine, of course; and I can scarcely be accused of vanity when I assume that he has held some new sort of provocative confab with Rupert regarding myself.

“ But what if the girl should become interested in him? I won’t have it! I won’t have it! These yachting parties, in which the conquered and mollified Lee plays propriety, whether I go or not, these walks on the shore, these evenings passed in shadowy nooks of the big piazza—I won’t endure it, and the whole affair must speedily cease. But how? how? Usk wanted me, with the money thrown in. He shall not get Ernestine, if that, after all, be his aim. As for Gregory and Lola, I scent less danger there, but with them, too, the situation is threatening.”

Once she sat by the starlit window of her own darkened room, and clenched her hands and longed to shriek aloud. That her earnest effort

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should end in this absurd fiasco! Horrible! horrible! Of all men calling themselves gentlemen, these were the last she would have chosen! And every phrase of the girls' immediate future had been so carefully considered and devised! She had begun her work as an unfaltering duty; she had meant to carry it through with an energy so different from that of the paid duenna! And then had come the great, irresistible fondness, overscrolling with its nimbus either cherished head! Her two pupils had grown into her two darlings. To her sense of duty was now added a sense of devotion.

The Summer slowly ebbed, but with it resolve strengthened. Her pair of maiden treasures should not be juggled, like this from out her embrace. It seemed only yesterday that she had told herself, with joyous prescience, how proudly she would regard them, at some future day, as the happy wives of men whom she should have selected for their husbands. Americans, Englishmen, Germans—what mattered their race, so long

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as they were worthy of having won these two rare-natured young women, and of discharging the vital responsibility that their vast incomes must involve? But this brazen and farcical imposture, this thief-in-the-night trickery, this crafty stealing of a march—there were times when to recall its beginnings, and to note its developments made the blood in Marian's veins like fluid fire.

She dreaded to speak with either of the girls. Reluctantly, one morning, however, she began with Ernestine.

“ You seem to like Lord Usk.”

Ernestine smiled dubiously. “ It’s occurred to me, somehow, that you don’t.”

“ But that would not influence you, my dear.”

“ Oh, yes, yes; it would influence me very much.”

“ Then, if I did not like Lord Usk——?”

“ I should want to know your reasons. I am sure they would be sufficient, satisfactory.”

Marian took her hand, holding it. “ Ah, Ernestine, our likings are never governed in that

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way. Unless I gave you strong proof that you ought not to like him you would go on doing so. Even, perhaps, if you found the proof very strong, it would not finally affect you."

Ernestine's hand closed more firmly round her friend's. " You speak as if you thought I had become ever so much attached to him!"

" Are you?"

" He's much older than I am, you know."

" But are you attached to him, Ernestine?"

The color went flying over the girl's face. She threw both arms round Marian's neck. " He can be awfully nice when he wishes," came the half-smothered response.

" True," said Marian, " he can be."

That evening there was an impromptu gathering at the Troops' villa. About twenty young girls and men gathered in the drawing-rooms. Leander got from the hotel two violinists and a pianist, and the young people danced, for by this time Ernestine and Lola were proficient in the art.

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Gregory had arrived, and was either whirling through the rooms with Lola or holding tête-à-têtes with her in retired nooks. Lord Usk had not yet arrived. Marian watched Ernestine from time to time. The girl did not look expectant. Her eyes never once wandered toward the doorways. The present assemblage ostensibly occupied her, and she did not appear desirous of any addition to it.

Marian was glad of this. It gave her a new courage, for it was her intent to waylay Lord Usk by the path from the hotel that he would surely take.

But perhaps he would not come at all. She stood motionless, for a little while, near a dark cluster of trees, waiting. Then, just as she was about to return into the villa she saw his tall figure advance.

"It's do or die, this night," she thought, and moved forward to meet him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ERNESTINE READS SOME LETTERS.

HE greeted her tranquilly. "I recognized you," he said, "before I saw your face. That light behind you, from the house there, brought out the lines of your figure. And of course it was a familiar image."

"You were coming to the little party?"

"Yes; I'm a bit late, though."

"Be a bit later, please. I want to talk with you. We can walk round and round this big circular flower-bed for a short while. I believe you've given up dancing, but if you want to see the dancers over yonder you can easily do so, until—"

She left her sentence unfinished, and pointed to the bright rooms, with wind-swayed curtains at

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their open windows and rhythmic moving shapes beyond.

“ Until—?” said Lord Usk.

“ Our conversation is through.”

“ Is it to be so very serious, then?”

She waved one hand, as though to dismiss useless parleyings. “ Why do you stay on here? You know very well that I understand how a place like Shaftesbury bores you; you’ve told me so twenty times. Evidently you did not come on my account. Are you remaining here because of Ernestine Troop?”

Her abruptness took him aback. “ This is all my affair,” he got out, after a pause. “ You’ve no right to pelt me with such questions.”

“ Pooh! I’ve every right. I am the custodian of both those girls. I love them both, dearly.”

“ From what I’ve heard, and considering your well-known attractions, you charge them somewhat cheaply.”

“ Ah, don’t try to fight me with sneers, Usk. Besides, it’s especially shabby of you. On your

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account, pray remember—because you were pitiless and even worse—I was driven from my brother's house. But never mind that. You're aiming, now, unless I'm in error, to marry Ernestine. Face to face, I tell you that this you cannot and shall not do."

She heard his low little wrathful laugh above the elfin arpeggios of the violins. "Some of you Americans are fond of saying that we Englishmen are brutes to our women. These lie; we're not. But if I hadn't cared an immense lot for you I believe I'd feel like something rather bulldoggish now."

"If you struck me or hurt me," said Marian, with her lip curled in the starlight, "you'd play into my hands. And so," she went on, with the pulse of passion stirring her voice, "I almost wish you would thus degrade yourself."

Usk stopped short in the path. "Why do you make such an infernal fuss about my marrying Ernestine? What is it to you?"

"It's this to me: you're not suited to her for a

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husband. She is not ready to marry yet, in my opinion——”

“ Oho! ” he jeered, “ in *your* opinion.”

“ And, too, if at any time she married a man like you, her life would be wretched. She might wear your coronet in a box at Covent Garden; she might rebuild, with her money, one of your fallen towers at Oxenham Abbey, or rehabilitate a ruined wing of Casilear Castle; she might become, through your gracious help, *persona grata* among the royalties. But if she began by loving you, she would end by hating you; and, in any case, she is not going to marry you. Mark that! I have the power to prevent it, Usk, and unless you swear to me this night that you will to-morrow leave Shaftesbury permanently, I swear to you that I will use this power, and make her cut you dead forever.”

“ Highly dramatic,” he jerked out, gutterally.  
“ The stage——”

“ Was my vocation. Why didn’t I choose it? Are you, a man of art, driven to that common-

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place coign of embarrassment—the sort of thing your cold-blooded villain always says in the emotional novels? Listen; listen sanely a minute, Usk, and don't let your temper play pranks with your prudence. You told Ernestine yesterday on the yacht that you had never loved any woman in your whole life till you met *her*. I got it out of the girl at last; I had trouble, though, for her modesty fought against the deep affection she bears me. And I got out more. She doesn't love you; she is simply flattered by your attentions. You're too old to rouse any real love in one of her years. Rather stupid of you not to have seen it! Now, you can accept my terms or refuse them, but it's wiser to do the first. It's wise to take the door of your own free will, rather than have it shut in your face."

"Look out that I don't have it shut in yours."

She heard some muttered words, and saw him dash forward into the brightness.

A little later she had slipped up to Ernestine's side, having taken a route shorter than Usk's.

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“ Ernestine.”

“ Yes, dear.”

“ Will you be brave, here among all these people, if I whisper something to you?”

“ Yes.” Pallor went with the girl’s monosyllable. She suspected, confusedly, yet somehow definitely.

“ Well, then, the man of whom I told you, the man whom I refused to marry, who persisted in his suit, whom my brother abetted, who finally forced me to make the appeal I did for the place I now hold—this man was Lord Usk.”

Ernestine caught sight, just then, of a tall form entering the room. She grasped Marian’s hand.

“ Will you tell me more?”

“ I will show you more.”

“ What?”

“ His letters—in my room—follow me there as soon as you can.”

Marian disappeared. Presently the girl found her up-stairs, seated beside a lamp-lighted table.

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Open envelopes and unfolded sheets of note-paper were strewn before her.

“ You saw him ? ” she asked.

“ Yes—only for a moment.”

“ And he said——”

“ He said that you were his worst enemy, and that—oh, Marian, I can’t repeat the rest ! ”

“ Pray do, Ernestine.”

“ That—you—were jealous ! ” the girl dragged out, “ fearfully jealous ! That you were going to tell me of how he had tried to become your husband, but that this would be falsehood, and that quite the reverse was true.”

Marian repressed a little shudder. “ Quite the reverse was true ? Ah, he has indeed been driven to desperate straits. Did—he speak—of his title, perchance ? ”

“ Yes—that you wanted to be Lady Usk and Casilear.”

“ He dared say that ! ” Just for a second, Marian’s eyes were violet flames there in the soft

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light. Frightened, Ernestine sank into a near chair.

"But I didn't believe him!" she asseverated.  
"Don't dream I did! I trust you as Lola does  
—as Lee does! I trust you even more!"

"Trusting is not hurt by seeing, Ernie, dear. Read these paragraphs. I've marked them with pencil on his letters while awaiting you. I don't know why it was that I kept them, when he was away in California and the Sandwich Islands—keeping letters has long been a habit with me. I've a big boxful of them, not a few from the most ordinary kinds of people. But his were not at all dull. They were often brilliant. You'll observe that when he implores me to become his wife he does so with considerable grace of diction.

"Have you finished that paragraph, my dear? Here, then, is another, and there are surely six more that I have marked. To-morrow, I can show you several others, if you wish. And yet he told you that I wanted to be Lady Usk—that jealousy was my present motive!"

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People were beginning to depart when Ernestine reappeared, that evening, in the drawing-rooms; for they kept early hours at Shaftesbury.

Lord Usk went to Ernestine as soon as he perceived her. She was pale, and her dark eyes emitted restless lights.

He put out his hand. "Everybody is saying good night, so I, too, must go, after having missed you for almost an hour."

Ernestine took no notice of the extended hand. She simply moved past Usk at the side of a lady, who was quitting the villa, accompanied by her husband.

It was the deadest of dead cuts. A number of those near witnessed it. Among them was Leander, who gave his sister a black look as Lord Usk went out into the hall.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE HEART OF LEANDER.

THE guests had all departed when Leander leveled on Ernestine his big guns. "Good heavens!" thought Marian, still seated up-stairs, on hearing the angry voices; "this will never do. They'll be called vulgarians even here in charitable Shaftesbury, if I'm not careful."

She went down-stairs and found Ernestine assailing her brother in tones very tart and shrill. "I'll write to Uncle Asa if you say another impudent word!"

The first to see Marian, Lola ran to her with blazing cheeks. "Erne is right," she said. "It is none of Lee's business to browbeat her as he's doing. She says she's her own mistress, and so she is. So am I."

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Marian whispered in Lola's ear. "The servants, my dear, must be listening somewhere. Remember what I've told you: self-restraint and refinement forever go hand in hand. Separate them and they both die."

Lola drooped her head. She went over to Ernestine and her brother. For a moment, her coming made no difference.

"I had my reasons," Ernestine was loudly affirming. "He deserved to be cut. He shall never come to this house again."

"This house isn't yours," Leander flared. "It happens to be mine."

"Then I'll take another! I'll——" Here Marian's hand touched her wrist. She turned, looked full into her guardian's mild yet assertive gaze, and added with a marked fall of the voice: "I'll go away with Marian somewhere else."

"Will you not come up-stairs with me now?" said Marian, very meaningfully. "To-morrow you and your brother can have out this argument, quarrel, discussion—whichever it is."

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"Ah," said Leander, his tones greatly softened, while he scanned Marian's face, so troubled, yet so dignified, "I think you know very well the nature of it and the cause of it—both."

She took a step or two, reaching his side. "Do stay up," she pleaded under her breath, "till I get the girls to their rooms and the servants to shut up the house, and all that! I beg of you, Lee! You won't refuse?"

"No," he said.

She had never called him "Lee" before. Once or twice, during past weeks it had been "Mr. Troop," or even "Leander." Generally it had been "you." The more familiar mode of address wounded him, hurt him, with a curious shock of pleasure.

He passed into another room, after this, and waited quietly while proofs of her administration, prompt and exact, went on in these lower quarters of the villa. She had always been administrative; she had assumed, superintended, executed in ways that he had never fully realized

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until now, as he watched the hurrying forms of servants, while they turned out lights, bolted doors, drew down and fastened windows. Presently he returned to the room in which he had left her with his sisters. Only one gas-jet lighted it. The house had grown very still. He saw by a clock on the mantel that it was nearly midnight.

Just then she noiselessly entered. "I hope," she at once said, "that I have not kept you waiting too long."

"Oh, no."

"I find that Ernestine told you nothing."

"She merely claimed her right to insult Lord Usk if she chose. I denied that, and then—well, you heard something of the row that followed.

Marian looked at him steadily. "Ernestine was right."

"Oho! Right to cut a visitor in her own home? Are these the lessons you teach her? Why, we learned our A B C of manners a good deal better in benighted old Stratton."

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She held him inexorably with her eyes while she made her answer. It was a very long answer, and when she had finished speaking, she drew from her pocket a package, and bade him read, just as she had done with Ernestine, certain penciled passages.

“Now,” she at length demanded, “have I been wrong?”

“It doesn’t seem to me,” came his reply, “that you ever are, or ever could be, wrong in anything.”

“Thanks.”

He tugged at his mustache. “And yet they say this fellow is rich.”

“Decidedly rich. Richer than most English peers.”

“Well, then——”

Marian shook her head from side to side. “Ah, but you forget, Ernestine is enormously rich.”

Leander scowled. “It’s pure avarice, then?”

“It’s the bedazzling lure of immense wealth.

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It's one of the snares and tricks from which I want so intensely to save your sisters, if I can." She gave him her hand, with a sudden impulse. "There, I've told you everything. Now act as you please."

A kind of grim fun broke into his features.  
"You never think of saving me."

She felt his fingers close on her hand, and she firmly drew it away. "Oh, men are—men. They can fight it out for themselves."

"Often we fight, yes; but we don't always fight it out."

"That's because——" she hesitated, vaguely smiling.

"Well? Because?"

"—you shirk issues."

"What kind of issues?"

"Must I be so very explicit? Put it this way, then: Why are you yourself not happy? Oh, I can see you're not! You have everything, and yet there are times when you feel as if you had nothing. Why is this?" In the still, hot room

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her tones were so low that they seemed almost like the drowsy music of light wind among leaves.

“ Why is this? ” Marian repeated.

“ Perhaps you know,” said Leander.

“ I guess.”

“ You should be sure—you, of all people.”

She passed this over, as if it had not been spoken. “ Men, so much more than women, have their happiness in their own hands. Countless women must drown in silence a sorrow that countless men have the option either to endure or dismiss. You are miserable because you treated most unfairly a good and true girl who loved you, whom you loved in return, and whom you love at the present hour.”

He gave a little cry of exasperation. “ You sounded that string the other day when we talked together on the yacht. You’re sounding it again. You mean that I should write Annie Shelton a letter? ”

“ I will write it for you! ” Marian eagerly threw back. “ I know just what you ought to

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tell Annie. I'll bring it to you when I've finished it, and we can go over it together. We'll discuss it, point by point. All that you disapprove I'll either alter, or else—" She pursed her flowerlike mouth here, creased her bewitching brows and raised a forefinger, letting it cut the air in slow, emphatic slants. "Or else—well—I'll argue the question till one of us yields."

Leander gave a high, dreary laugh. "You mean till I yield. How you must have your way with every one!" His eyes flashed. "Good God! you can have it with me. If you'll marry me—"

"No, no. Don't go on. I abhor that! You know why."

But he was obdurate. He named a great sum. "Before you become my wife it shall be turned over to you, every dollar. There! Do you hate me so much that you'll cast me off even on those terms?"

"I don't hate you," she said. "I am fond of you, in a way. You're at heart the best of brothers. Besides that, you've many fine traits.

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But you don't love me any more than I love you. You think that you love me, though you really love Annie still. And then, you know, Leander, it's vulgar, terribly vulgar, to flare money in the face of any woman whom you respect."

"Oh, no, no! I—"

"Yes, I understand. But in this case, it's more than vulgar—it's disloyal."

"I—never—told—Annie—"

"That you wanted to be her husband? Oh, yes, you did. You told her by your actions many a time in those three or four years. Your own words have confessed it to me."

"You say that I only think I love you, Marian Warrender! You're very wise; I grant you that. But how can you be wise enough to read my heart?"

"Because you show it to me like a necktie."

"How?"

"You are unhappy, and I am not the cause. Ten times, at least—since I have lived with the girls and yourself—you have asked them anxious-

## The Vulgarians.

ly about their letters from friends in Stratton. This was when the post came without your having first seen the writing on various envelopes. But, whenever you saw the letters first—and I chanced to watch you look them over—I have noted with what eager eye you have scanned each superscription. You know your Annie's handwriting only too well. You thought she would write to your sisters. But she has not written, and you are too proud—ah, must I say too purse-proud?—to have sent her, on your own part, a single line!"

He answered harshly. "I suppose I'm a vulgarian; I suppose we're all three vulgarians. You know all about the other things—culture, manners, decorum. But isn't it rather unrefined to tell me, right to my face, that I'm—purse-proud?"

"Yes," Marian assented. "But I had to do it. Pardon me. Still, I did it with a purpose. I wanted to be curative, and so I was—surgical." Here she let her hand fall for a second on his

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arm. "What you feel toward me is merely fascination. Oh, trust me, trust me, for I am right."

"You would call Annie a vulgarian, if you met her," he said, doggedly. "And if you didn't, others would."

"I want to meet her." Then, as if spurred by a sudden inspiration: "Go to her, Leander, if you won't write. Go to her, marry her there in Stratton, and bring her here. The girls, you know, are very fond of her. She shall be my third pupil. Bring her."

As she said these words Marian slightly opened her arms, with a receptive gesture. At this moment, quite unconsciously, she was magnificent.

With agitated face and between eyelids contracted as if by the stress of painful revolt, Leander watched, appreciated, admired her.

But he answered, with a kind of strangled savagery: "No, no. Make it as many pupils as you please. Only I won't write and I won't go to Stratton. I'll stay on here, with my neck under your heel. You're a born despot. You're only

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contented when you can lay down the law. You want the earth. Well, I'd give it to you if I could, and how glad you'd be to get it!"

She looked at him across one shoulder, with a sad smile, just as she was leaving the room.

"Ah," she said, "how unreasonable! Haven't you just offered it to me, and haven't I refused it?"

Going up-stairs through the darkened house, Marian broke into one of her rare fits of tears. Once in her bedchamber, she sought for a hidden photograph of her dead husband, and stared steadily into the unforgettable features.

"Oh, Arthur, you may have heard! They say that everybody has his price—and hers! In this money-mad world of to-day I refused millions, just for a memory! But that memory is priceless, my lost love! A planetful of gold could not purchase it!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### GREGORY'S AWAKENING.

MARIAN breakfasted in her own apartments. She received a shock when she asked the maid concerning Ernestine and Lola. Did not Mrs. Warrender remember? This was the morning of their bicycle trip to Thaxter Cove. They had gone an hour ago, joining Mrs. Larrabee and some ladies and gentlemen who had called for them. They had wished to bid her good-bye but would not wake her, and they knew it had been settled that she was not to join them.

"How forgetful of me!" Marian murmured.  
"Ellen, by the way——"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did you notice if Lord Usk was in Mrs. Larrabee's party?"

"I didn't see him, ma'am."

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“ Nor Mr. Gregory Renshawe? ”

“ He wasn’t there neither,” said Ellen.

“ And Mr. Troop, did he go with the young ladies? ”

“ Yes, ma’am. He jumped on his wheel just while they mounted theirs.”

A little after luncheon-time, Gregory strolled into the villa. He did not find Marianindoors, but seated with a book amid the shadows wrought by tapestries of honeysuckle on a certain segment of the generous piazza. He handed her a letter, and then sank gracefully into a hammock directly in front of her.

Marian glanced at the letter. “ From Usk to Ernestine? ” she said.

“ Yes.”

“ How odd that he didn’t send it more secretly.”

“ He had no such wish. It merely contains four or five lines of good-bye, wholly conventional.”

“ He’s going, then? ”

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“He has gone.”

Marian instantly suspected some treachery, and slightly threw back her head with an air of cool defiance.

“Gone where?” she demanded.

“Oh, anywhere; to New York for the present, I suppose. He’s thrown up the game. He’ll never trouble you again, auntie, dear. It isn’t that he endorses your scheme of guardianship and amelioration as either permissible or otherwise. It’s only that he accepts my advice.”

“Your advice, Gregory?”

“Does that seem so incredible?” Here Gregory rocked himself rather vehemently in the hammock. “Well, you’ve always thought me rather a precocious baby.”

“Far from it. But I’ve——”

“Nevertheless, I stayed away from Mrs. Larabee’s picnic in order to have a tussle with Usk. It lasted two hours. He consumed about fifty cigarettes during that interim, and now and then it looked as if he were about to fling one of them

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in my face. But he didn't; he listened, and was finally persuaded."

Gregory slowly pulled off one of his dove-colored gloves of Swedish kid. He had thrown his dove-colored wide-awake on the little table that held some bit of his aunt's neglected fancy-work. Marian watched him, in his spotless flannels, with his lilac necktie and fresh linen and varnished boots. He was not foppishly dressed; it was the perfect sea-side costume of his period. The face like sculpture, the eyes like large bluish gems, the fleece of short, thick curls, curving trimly round either temple, suited his gear as a portrait suits its frame.

All this Marian took in and keenly admired. Once she had had a soft spot in her heart for this comely young relative. Something of the old fondness returned now. Had its reaction anything to do with the words he had just spoken?

" You say, Gregory, that Usk was finally persuaded—and by yourself? "

" Yes. I convinced him that it was caddish to

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try and cut under you like this, in your efforts to place those girls on a level with their new requirements."

"Then he has really gone?"

"Oh, absolutely, permanently. Shall I add, dear auntie, eternally? It would be true. You've one less weasel to scare away from your chickens?"

Marian laughed, unwillingly. "Who are the other weasels?"

"I don't know of any but one," said Gregory, sadly. He gave the hammock a bold rearward swing, and then stopped it with an out-jutting foot.

"I mean myself."

"Then you admit——?"

"That I came here, precisely as I first told you, out of curiosity. Perhaps I came to scoff. But I stayed to pray. I stayed to pray that you would let me marry Lola." He dashed up from the hammock, caught a wicker chair, and twirled it dexterously to within an inch of Marian's.

## The Vulgarians.

Then he sank into it, and caught his kinswoman's hand. "Oh, auntie, I've been wayward and worldly in my talk, in my ideas, in my actions. We were once great chums, were we not? But somehow we stopped being chummy any more, didn't we, about two years ago? I remember that day so well when you told me I was good-looking, talented, witty, attractive, but hard as a stone. It grieved me so much to be called hard as a stone. And I resented it, furtively scoffed at it. But the callousness of which you accused me was only callowness, after all. I was such a silly youngster; I was so ridiculously *en herbe*. It was a little hard on me to call me hard. I was merely soft, in the sense of absurd egotism wedded to sophomoric youth. And then father—he had been so cruelly hard! But never mind that. . . . Since I came here you must have seen a change in me, auntie—you must have seen it and wondered at it."

"Really, Gregory," said Marian, "I've done nothing of the sort."

## The Vulgarians.

She spoke somewhat listlessly. But feeling his hand tighten about her own, she turned and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

"Oh, Gregory!" she exclaimed; and a great rush of feeling swept through her bosom, half born from the bonds of blood, half from the remembrance of earlier intimate and cherishing hours. "Perhaps other thoughts have preoccupied me, dear boy. Is there a change?"

"Ah, you have loved, auntie, so you must know what I mean when I tell you that love has worked the change! All my world has grown different. And only because of that little bright-haired girl, Lola. I've never said to her one word of the truth. There have been days and evenings, here at Shaftesbury, when I felt that it must leap from my lips. But I kept silent, and I don't know at this moment if the darling girl cares for me or not! I was loyal to you, auntie. Mother and I had talked your plan over, and I knew you so well that I felt sure you would carry it out in a spirit of the sweetest loyalty, while

## The Vulgarians.

working your own self-release. I don't ask you for Lola now. I ask you to give her to me at some future day! I ask you to let me ask her if she loves me. Then I promise you that I will wait. And meanwhile I will go back to father. Whatever he tells me to do down-town in that awful office I'll perform with sublime humility. I'll be a saint there—an excessively unbusiness-like and uncommercial one, most probably, but still a saint. I can't very well suffer and be strong in arithmetic, but my aureole must cast a halo over incorrect multiplication and sanctify blunders in book-keeping. There—you're laughing! That's because I've fallen into my old joking groove again. But, ah, auntie, though life used to be a big, gilded joke to me, it isn't going to be that any more. It's going to be monstrously serious. You'll trust me, will you not? I don't care for her money. I hate the very thought of it! I wish she hadn't a dollar! I love my little Lola—I love her, I love her, and if I lived a thousand years she'd be my first love and my

## The Vulgarians.

last! Now, auntie, you will trust me, will you not?"

Marian's answer came slowly. She took both his hands and looked at him long and with great steadiness, while her lips trembled and her violet eyes burned like Winter stars.

Then she leaned forward and kissed him, quite gently, on the forehead. But still she made no answer. Once again she looked at him very steadily, and her fingers round either of his hands, grew tenser.

At last, with a sudden self-abandoning tenderness, inexpressibly sweet, she kissed him full on the lips.

"Yes, dear Gregory, I will trust you!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### ARRANGEMENTS.

THE bicycle party arrived from Thaxter Cove quite late in the afternoon. But only a few minutes after Ernestine, Lola and Leander had smilingly bidden their companions adieu, both girls were in tears, and their brother unhappily frowning.

Uncle Asa had written them from Stratton. The letter, carefully devised not to shock, nevertheless brought pangs of alarm. They realized with poignant suddenness how dear their mother had been to them. For a time they clung to one another; they stared into one another's eyes; even the near presence of Marian faded into a sort of mistlike contiguity. But, strangest of all, the garments of their late mental rehabilitation

## The Vulgarians.

dropped, so to speak, away from them. They addressed one another as they had done at Stratton; they clipped their words; they floundered piteously among impetuous "ain'ts" and "guesses;" they dissipated unawares the new melodies that either tutelage or unconscious mimicry had infused into their voices, and uttered their cries of grief in the old homely tones of humbler days.

For a while, Marian watched them, infinitely touched. She felt disassociated from them, exiled, repelled. Soon her eyes wandered toward Leander's melancholy face. He gave her a quick nod, which she as quickly comprehended.

She went to the girls at once, and reached an arm about either of their necks. Immediately they gave her tearful yet ardent welcomes. The dark head and the bright head meekly sank on her shoulder.

"Now, girls," began Marian, in her cheeriest staccato, "you're both tired after your long trip, and you must both lie down. Come up-stairs with

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me, and I'll do all I can to lull you into a good nap before dinner. I'll read aloud to you, or I'll get nice old Madame Boudinot to intone one of those French poems that you think so full of music but insist that you can't yet understand. There isn't the slightest reason for you to feel utterly cast down like this. What, really, has your Uncle Asa written? Why, merely that your mother had been feeling lonely and sad for about a month past, and that the doctor said her heart was weak, and that he didn't like to tell you through fear of causing needless anxiety. Then, the other day, she had a fainting fit in church. Well, the weather out there was horribly hot, as we've been reading in the newspapers, and very probably the sermon was tedious. He promised you that the minute she grew at all worse he would telegraph. But nearly a week has passed since the date of his letter, and he hasn't yet made a sign. Surely there was never a more conclusive case of no news being good news. Think how many people in the world have weak

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hearts and yet live on with them for years, and years. And a mere fainting spell! Why, girls, I thought you had more sense. She wants to see you, Lola? Well, what's to prevent your going on? You might find her dead when you got there, Ernie? Now I see the folly of 'biking' twenty miles in one day. You're both horribly fagged out, and——"

Standing with one elbow on the mantelpiece, Leander heard the tender-consolatory voice die away. They left the room in a triple embrace, of which Marian made the center. He sat down and tried to be stoically patient until she returned. He somehow felt that she would return. Certain prompt arrangements must be made, and of course they must talk these over together.

It seemed to him an age until she reappeared. "Well?" he said, quickly rising.

"They're both so tired, poor dears!" Marian said. "They're asleep already."

"You think, naturally, that mother must be a very sick woman?"

## The Vulgarians.

"Your uncle hasn't telegraphed."

"True. But we ought to go right on. That's your opinion, isn't it?"

Marian seemed to turn it over. "Yes," she presently answered.

He looked at her with a wistful forlornness.

"We'll take their two maids?"

"Oh, by all means. And your man as well—why not? I'll have the packing begun this evening. Tell your man, please, that I want his help."

Leander's eyes could not leave her face. He coughed; he fumbled jerkily with his watch chain.

"Suppose poor mother dies," he somberly brought out.

"Why, then," said Marian, low-voiced, "you'd come back. Wouldn't you?"

He coughed again. "Why, yes, yes—of course. But if—she lingers on—in sickness?"

"Oh, then, you couldn't come back—could you?"

## The Vulgarians.

"No." Here Leander drew in a long, deep breath. His eyes fell, then lifted. "It's only fair to settle everything with you. It isn't right that you should suffer because of this—this accident."

Marian, for a moment, seemed bewildered. "Settle with me? Suffer because— Oh!" And her face brightened understandingly. "I see. You think I'll take my salary without earning it? Never! never! For surely you don't dream I'd desert the girls now, when they need me most!"

Leander sprang toward her. "God bless you! You're going to Stratton with us, then?"

"And coming back with you, I hope, in a few weeks, when your mother is better and sanctions a second leave-taking."

Leander kissed the hand she had let him hold. "I'm so glad!" he faltered.

"No more than I am," said Marian. "Did you fancy you could get rid of me so easily? Not a bit of it! Thus far it's all been a prelude with my two darlings. The green curtain is still down;

## The Vulgarians.

the musicians have played one air, and as the performance isn't yet ready, through some little hitch of delay, they're about to begin another. Besides, to change my metaphor, I'm very anxious to get a glimpse of our national Rockies from one of those superb drawing-room cars that I'm always hearing about. And while we're admiring them, Lee, I want to tell you a little secret that concerns Lola and my nephew, Gregory Renshawe. But never mind it now— Go? Why, what on earth made you imagine I wouldn't go?"

"I can't tell," he stammered. "I—I ought to have known you'd be faithful to—the—girls."

His hand-clasp had grown more fervent than she liked. She gave him a slight frown, whose rebuke and reminder he palpably accepted, and slipped her hand from his loosening hold. The next instant, however, her face became filled with its gayest yet subtlest charm.

"The girls—ah, true enough! Still, I'm going on your account, too."

"On mine?"

## The Vulgarians.

“Oh, yes. I do so want to meet a certain person.”

“A—certain—person?”

“You know whom I mean. Don’t pretend to be obtuse; it ill becomes any one of so keen a mind. Whom could I mean but—Annie Shelton?”

“You want to meet her, then?” he asked.

“I want to see you meet her—to be near you both when you have met. Do I not make myself plain?”

An eager kindness overflowed her look. But in it there was also a species of tender prophecy.

Leander tried to smile. Then his face clouded wretchedly. “Ah, no, no!” he cried. “This will not do!”

Marian intently watched him. “It will not do?” she repeated, in tones of direct, acute interrogation. “Then what will do?”

“That—that idea—you must—give it up,” said Leander, as if clogged and mired among his own words. The next sentence was steadier: “I’ll

## The Vulgarians.

not agree to have you go on there for the purpose of making me marry Annie Shelton. It's too nonsensical—too farcical!"

"Very well," said Marian. "If I don't bring you together as you should be brought together, I will not go at all."

"I can't help that." Leander spoke with half-averted face.

Marian at once moved away from him. "So be it. When the girls wake I shall tell them that I am not going to Stratton."

"Tell them why, please," called Leander, turning on her with a dreary fierceness.

"You can tell them that, if you choose," said Marian; and immediately she passed from the room.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A TELEGRAM.

THE girls wakened from a long nap, refreshed and eager for their dinner.

"I sha'n't go down-stairs with you," Marian said to them. "You can dine with Leander. I have a hard headache, and all that I shall want I will tell the servants to bring me."

"Oh, you, too, are worried!" said Ernestine, "I don't wonder; you've grown so like one of ourselves." She hesitated, reaching out a hand toward Lola, who came and stood beside her. "If we must go back, Marian, it will be sad to leave you behind us."

"Ah, so very!" added Lola.

"Sadder still for me to remain," Marian answered. "But your brother will tell you——"

## The Vulgarians.

She paused, for a servant had entered, bearing something on a salver. Ernestine quickly caught it up. "A telegram. 'Troop,'" she read, in quivering voice. "That means," while tearing open the envelope, "that Uncle Asa has—bad—news."

"Perhaps not," said Marian, with all the cheeriness she could muster. "Let me see." And she took the telegram from Ernestine's tremulous fingers. First she swiftly scanned its contents. A glad cry soon followed this rapid perusal.

"Listen, girls, listen! Glorious news! It's taken away my headache, and it ought to give you splendid appetites!" Then she read aloud:

"Mother all right now. I think it must have been the awful heat we have had out here. The doctor thinks so, too. I guess both doctor and me were only scared. But you know Dr. Freeman, our old friend, so I needn't tell you how much he thinks of your ma and every one of us. Now, don't worry any more, for there isn't the least reason to. Your ma is as likely to see her

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eightieth birthday as not. She took a long walk to-day and wasn't a bit tired, and ever since the cool weather came she's eaten and slept fine, and now she's as well as anybody in Stratton.

“‘UNCLE ASA.’”

The girls were sobbing with joy as Marian ended, but they soon dried their eyes. Marian kissed them, told them that dinner was waiting, and that their brother should, by all means, hear without further delay the magnificent tidings.

Her influence, always potent with them, soon wrought its accustomed results. After they had gone down-stairs, she dropped into a chair. Directly in front of her was a small table near which she had stood while reading the telegram aloud. In another instant she perceived that the telegram still lay there—that the girls, who had doubtless intended to take it with them down into the dining-room, had forgotten it.

“Well, they'll send or come for it,” she thought. And then her mind wandered to other matters. “They are probably—most probably—

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not going to Stratton now. Still, the very effects of this shock may give them the desire to pay their mother at least a short visit. And I cannot go; my mission ends. Leander has confused everything. He has darkened my day, troubled my little lake, frosted my grass, leveled my trees, desecrated the whole landscape of my new expected life. By this time, I should have told him about Gregory's love for Lola. What will Gregory say to-morrow when he hears that I have not even faintly urged his cause? Oh, if I could only do something to show this Leander how ungenerously he has treated the girl he really loves! But I cannot—I cannot! I confront a locked door, and the key is lost!"

This last reflection drifted through Marian's mind just as her eye fell once more on the open telegram. Who can penetrate the mystery of certain mental mutations? Like a flash, she started from her chair, for like a flash, the possibility of an unforeseen project had besieged her faculties.

She stood for a moment irresolute. The ser-

## The Vulgarians.

vant might soon arrive with the dishes she had ordered. Close beside her was the empty grate. She glanced at several newspapers on an adjacent chair. Her first action was to lay hold of these, crumple several sheets, cast them into the grate and apply a match. The blaze quickly followed. She seized the telegram, and flung it into the little fiery turmoil.

“Now!” she said aloud.

Just then a knock sounded. It was the servant with tray and plates. There was an odor of smoke in the room, and the flames were playing more feebly and fitfully in the grate.

“I’ve been burning some old papers and letters,” Marian explained.

“Mr. Troop, ma’am,” said the servant, “would like to see the telegram that the young ladies opened.”

Marian pretended to search. “I can’t find it anywhere,” she presently announced. “I thought Miss Ernestine or Miss Lola took it down-stairs.”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A VENIAL DECEPTION.

WHEN the servant came to her room, Marian said: " You needn't bring anything more. I think I shall soon go for a little walk. Say this to the young ladies if they should come up and find me absent."

Soon afterward, she slipped from the house by a side door, and stole to the windows of the dining-room. Through the lace-curtains, she saw both the girls rise from the table and slowly disappear. Leander remained seated for some time; then, at length, quitted his chair with nervous haste. Suddenly, he stood quite still, and then—in an absent way—approached one of the open windows. While he was drawing back its curtain Marian glided nearer.

## The Vulgarians.

"Will you join me out here?" she asked. "I have something to tell you."

She moved quickly away, not waiting for his answer. She began to walk round the spacious, circular flower-bed, keenly remembering at each new step the harrying interview held not long ago with Lord Usk.

Leander joined her sooner than she had expected. As they began to move onward, side by side, she questioned:

"Shall you go now with the girls?"

"I shall go without the girls," he answered. "I'll leave them in your charge, if you'll let me."

"Of course; but the telegram—"

"Ernestine told me every word of it." He drew in a deep breath. "The relief has been enormous."

"And yet you are going?"

"Yes. I shall make them a visit. I—I think it best. I—" He stopped, dead short.

"Ah," said Marian, touching his arm for a

## The Vulgarians.

second, "you are going because of Annie Shelton!"

He did not respond, so she went on. "This alarm, this flurry of fear and dread, has turned your mind toward a new anxiety. Tell me that I'm right, Lee. I said to you not long ago that you still loved her. You've thought of what might happen to her. The old are not all of us who are threatened. What calamity might at any moment overtake Annie? You love her. You know you love her. You know you're secretly ashamed of the way you've treated her."

They moved on in silence for a little space. At a certain spot where Marian recalled that there stood a rustic bench, she reached forth dizzily in the dubious gloom, and caught one of its arms. A faintness had assailed her, but it was transient, soon yielding to her effort at governance.

Leander looked down at the place that he might have taken beside her, but remained standing.

## The Vulgarians.

"I must do it—I must do it. It shall be done—if everything else fails."

Thus hurriedly spoke Marian to her own agitated heart. Next instant she heard Leander saying, "So this is the something you wanted to tell me? But I've heard it all from you before."

"You can't hear it too often. And you can't deny its truth. Tell me, do you intend to return from Stratton without bringing her here as your wife?"

He turned away. "Oh, perhaps she's married to another sweetheart by now."

"'Everything else,' as I called it," swept through Marian's thought, "has failed! Now for my last attempt!"

Aloud she said: "Suppose you were told that she was lying, at the present moment, very dangerously ill?"

"What do you mean?" he demanded, sharply.

Marian let a sequence of seconds go flying by. She seemed to be counting them. "Suppose Annie were dead," she murmured.

## The Vulgarians.

"Dead!" He flung himself into the seat at her side. "That telegram?" he demanded.  
"What did you do with it?"

"I burned it."

"Burned it?"

"Yes, by mistake. I threw into the grate some old letters and papers I wished to destroy, and somehow the telegram must have got itself mixed up with these. Ernestine had left it on my table instead of bringing it down-stairs. Everything that I read to her from it was true. But there was something added that I did not read. I wanted to spare them, for the present at least, further distress. I wanted to spare them these words: 'You will be sorry to learn that your old friend, Annie Shelton, has a terrible attack of typhoid in its worst form. She is now very low, and Dr. Freeman tells me there is only the faintest hope.' "

Leander's first words made it clear that he had not doubted the truth of what she had just said.

"I should have heard that sooner."

## The Vulgarians.

“ Why? ” she asked.

“ Because—” He rose. “ Because—” he began again, chokingly. Then, dropping back into his seat: “ Oh, I should have wired Uncle Asa, by this, for constant news! I should have tried to find out the earliest train for Stratton! ” The sentence ended in a sharp shiver. She saw that he was trembling. His knotted hand, laid on the bar of cedar behind him, shook with odd tremors.

Her own agitation lessened. In place of it an intense yet quiet pity took possession of her. She leaned nearer to him. His face was drooped, and as she watched his vague form she perceived that it shook at intervals like his clenched hand.

“ You—you did love her, then, Lee? ” she said.

“ Yes.”

“ And yet you treated her——”

“ Oh, horribly, horribly! I knew, all this time, that she was suffering there, thousands of miles away! ”

“ Strange, strange,” Marian mused aloud.

## The Vulgarians.

" You were willing to tell me that you loved me; you were willing to beg of me as you did," she continued, with more direct personal address. " that I should become your wife. And so, all along, I have been right. It was bewitchment, infatuation—an emotion on the surface of this profounder feeling, like—like curls of foam, Lee, on some deep wave. Am I not right? Tell me; am I not right?"

He raised his head; the lowered moonlight struck level against his tormented face.

" Yes, yes. I think that nothing but this could have shown me the difference between these two attachments. Dying there at Stratton! Poor Annie!"

He sprang to his feet. Marian, a second later, rose also. She caught the lapel of his coat, staring fervidly into his face.

" You are sure, now, that you've always loved her best? You have no doubt? I want you to be quite—quite certain that even if she dies—"

" If she dies," he struck in, " I shall never cease

## The Vulgarians.

to feel racked with remorse. I remember your words to me now; they seem burning into my brain; ‘ You are unhappy, but I am not the cause.’ Then you called me ‘ purse-proud.’ I was. It was the money, the new, monstrous lot of money, that made me leave her as I did—poor Annie!” He covered his face, and soon she heard sounds of sobbing.

At this moment, she moved a little apart. The truth had come to him at last! But she must not let him endure this pain. She must unlie her lie. And how would he receive these fresh tidings? Never mind how; if his anger crushed her she must not leave him, poor, wilful, foolish boy, with this hard, stabbing agony. She used great effort to make herself thoroughly calm. Retracing her steps, she reached his side.

“ Lee.”

He turned and faced her in the shadow.  
“ Well?”

“ I lied to you. I lied because I thought it might be best—might show you your own heart.



*"'You lied to me! you tricked me!"'*



## The Vulgarians.

As far as I know, Annie Shelton is quite well. There was nothing at all about her in the telegram —nothing, nothing."

She saw his face soften, then gladden. Next there came into it a hard, harsh look. It frightened her—she recoiled.

" You lied to me! you tricked me! You admit it?"

" Yes."

" Then to-morrow you must go away. I will never notice you again. This must be your last night with my sisters—this has been your last day under our roof."

He passed hastily from her sight, into the swallowing dimness of the hemlocks that stood in denser groups a little beyond.

" Why, Marian, where have you been?" said Ernestine. " It is cold out of doors. You look so pale, and you're trembling!"

" I was walking outside for a short while," Marian answered. " I thought the fresh air

## The Vulgarians.

might help my headache." She looked about the brightly lighted sitting-room. "Where's Lola?"

Ernestine first answered with an odd little smile. "She's yonder." A doorway, tapestried in light-blue silk, gave on a smaller apartment, which they had grown to call "the nook." Just then Marian heard a high, merry laugh.

"Gregory is with her?"

"Yes," replied Ernestine.

"I—I think I'll go up-stairs," Marian said, wearily. "I've been down by the shore; I sat for a while in that little Summer-house on the rocks."

"But you were away so long. It must be an hour now since I went to your room and found you'd left it."

"Yes, dear. Has—your brother—come back?"

"He went up-stairs a good while ago."

"Did—he—speak to you?"

"No. He seemed to be in trouble."

Ernestine was searching her friend's face.  
"And so are you! Oh, Marian, tell me—"

Suddenly Marian threw both arms around the

## The Vulgarians.

speaker's neck. "Oh, Ernie, dear, I must leave you; I must leave you both!"

"Leave us!" cried the girl. "You shall not! Who says that you must?"

At this moment, Leander came quietly into the room. He was very pale. He paused for an instant, then approached Marian. He held a small folded paper, which he extended toward her.

"Will you read this?" he said.

Marian took the paper. Presently she read:

"Forgive me. After all, I think you have been right. I know you so well that I feel what you did must have been very difficult for you to do. And, when all is said, I feel also, that I cannot and ought not to blame you."

Marian rose from the sofa almost staggeringly. She had never been more beautiful than now, with her burning violet eyes and the vivid rose of her cheeks.

"God bless you, Lee!" she cried, and caught each of his hands with her own.

## The Vulgarians.

“ Some one else should say that of yourself,” he answered.

“ You mean—Annie? Let me hear her say it one day! Let me hear soon! You are going to her?”

“ I am going to her—yes.”

“ And you’ll bring her back as your wife?”

He drooped his head. There was silence. Marian waited, with all her heart in her face.

Slowly, but with sincerest intonation, Leander broke the pause. “ Yes, I shall hope to bring her back as my wife.”

Just as he turned away there came pealing from the room in which Gregory and Lola were seated another high and merry laugh.

“ Listen,” said Ernestine. “ How happy they seem!”

Marian spoke in her ear, with a blithe whisper. “ Soon your brother will be just as happy, and not long afterward you, too, will be; I’m nearly certain.”

## The Vulgarians.

“ And what of yourself? ” asked Ernestine.  
“ Of me? ” Marian replied. “ Oh, I shall never be any happier than you’ve already seen me. But I expect to be immensely contented! ”

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